

Persia

I. Pastoral Life in the Land of the Shah

By Sir Percy Sykes, K.C.I.E.

Author of "A History of Persia," etc.

BETWEEN the low-lying valley of the Indus on the east and that of Mesopotamia (renamed Irak) on the west there rises a vast plateau which includes not only Persia, but also Afghanistan and Baluchistan. This plateau is termed the Iranian, for Persia is termed Iran by its inhabitants, the word being a form of the European word "Aryan." In fact, Persia is the land of the Aryans, and the Persians were the first Aryans to be civilized and to found communities which developed into great empires. The altitude of the plateau is considerable, exceeding 5,000 feet at Kerman and at Shiraz, and 3,000 feet in the case of Teheran, the capital, and Meshed, the chief town of the great province of Khorassan. Ispahan, once the capital and situated in the centre, stands 5,000 feet up. In complete contrast with this plateau is the strip bordering the Persian Gulf, which is terribly hot and unhealthy. Similarly, the Caspian provinces, to the north are low-lying and unhealthy. The total area of the country averages 1,000 miles from east to west and 700 miles from north to south.

It is beginning to be widely recognized that the rainfall of a country is of great importance. Unfortunately, in Persia there are only ten inches in the north and half that amount in the south, as against forty inches for the British Isles. So meagre a rainfall means that the country is covered with a steppe vegetation. Instead of succulent grass that covers more favoured lands, sterile Persia can only show stunted bushes growing several feet apart from one another. Between them, in the spring and early summer, a few miserable

blades of grass that can almost be counted appear, and are eagerly devoured by the flocks of sheep and goats that thrive all over the country. The sheep are of the "fat-tailed" variety. In the late spring their tails weigh eighteen pounds or thereabouts, whereas at the end of the winter they have shrunk to perhaps one-sixth the weight.

Persia, at best, is a land of deserts, with few oases, and its centre is a dead heart—one vast desert. It is curious how much the Koran affects nomenclature in Moslem countries. This great central desert is termed Lut, the Koranic



MULLAH OF MAHOMEDAN PERSIA
The Persian priesthood shows itself a fanatical opponent of progress, but recognizes any man as a mullah, provided he can read and interpret the Koran

Photo, A. Brett



PRIEST AND MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD AT THE NOONDAY PRAYER

The social structure of Persian life is based on the Mahomedan law, but the country is the stronghold of the Shiite schism, recognizing Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, as his successor, in opposition to the Sunnites who form the majority in the Moslem world. Though strictly adhering to the letter, the devout bigotry of the Persian priesthood has but feeble regard for the spirit of the law

Photo, Georg Haeckel

form of the name of Abraham's nephew, Lot. Guides point out bluffs worn by the wind, which is extraordinarily potent, and carves the naked soil into fantastic shapes resembling castle, palace, or minaret, and declare that these are the cities of Lot. This is, undoubtedly, the origin of the name, a view supported by the fact that the Dead Sea is termed Bahr-i-Lut, or the Sea of Lot.

I have crossed the Lut in many parts. My first journey was from north to south, and I was the first European

to traverse this section since the great Venetian traveller, Marco Polo, in the thirteenth century. He feelingly referred to the water as "bitter green stuff, so salt that no one can drink it," but did not describe the various phases of sandhills—stony, bare ranges, and saline swamps of ochrous slime. These last are most dangerous in case of rain, and many caravans have been engulfed and totally lost when overtaken by a rainstorm. Only less dangerous are the sandstorms. Indeed, the track is marked by skeletons of animals.

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The mountains have a regular trend from the south-east to the north-west. This makes the approach from Irak extremely difficult, as range after range has to be crossed at rightangles. During the Great War a metalled, well-graded road was constructed from the rail-head in Irak to Hamadan, to the distinct benefit of the country. The great northern range is the Elburz. South of the Caspian it throws up the gigantic peak of Demavend, which rises to about 18,000 feet above sea-level and is the highest peak in Asia west of the

Himalayas. In the extreme south-east is Kuh-i-Taftan, which I was the first European to scale at about a height of 13,000 feet. It is a volcano in the solfatara stage, with smoke issuing from its craters. These great ranges play a decisive part in retaining the moisture that falls in the form of snow, which melts in the spring and waters the crops. But for these ranges Persia would be as much a desert as Arabia.

The rivers of this arid, treeless country are of little importance. Indeed, from the Indus to the Shatt-el-Arab, no river



VENERABLE DESCENDANTS OF AN ERSTWHILE SCOURGE OF SOCIETY

They are Ismailis, descended from the famous Assassins, followers of Hassan-i-Sabbah, who, in 1071, joined the Ismailis, a secret sect of the Shiites, and devoted himself to undermining the power of Islam. Feared throughout the Mahomedan world, for no man was safe from their daggers, the Assassins pursued their evil work without hindrance up to the time of the Mongol invasion

Photo, Sir P. Sykes



GRACE OF UNCULTURED WOMANHOOD DISPLAYED IN RHYTHMIC DANCE BEFORE APPRECIATIVE VILLAGE SPECTATORS
 Among most high-class Persians it is considered degrading to practise dancing and music, these arts being practically confined to professionals. But the free and easy, unconventional life of the nomad gypsies, who wander all over the country, picking up a living as best they can, knows no restrictions, and their swarthy-skinned daughters may sometimes be seen giving public exhibitions of their skill as dancers and musicians. Here, in a quiet corner of a village courtyard, against a mud-wall background, gypsy girls are performing a characteristic dance and exciting the admiration and applause of the spectators by their graceful posturing

Photo, Underwood Press Service



LADY OF RANK IN THE LAND OF THE LION AND THE SUN

All Persian women are fond of silks and bright colours, and the lady of rank and means decks herself out with all the gay trappings in which her heart delights. Fine embroideries are sometimes produced by the more energetic of them, for time hangs heavily on their hands, and eating sweetmeats, yawning their lives away like grown-up children, suffice only the minority

Photo, Underwood Press Service



HOUSEHOLD VESSELS FOR SALE IN A KAZVIN BAZAAR

Only on Friday, the Mahomedan equivalent of our Sunday, is business stilled in the Persian bazaars. In this coppersmith's shop graceful ewers stand side by side with vessels of a more ungainly make, for nearly all household utensils are made of beaten copper, those used for cooking being tinned over. Time is no object in Persia, and weeks of discussion may precede the completion of a bargain

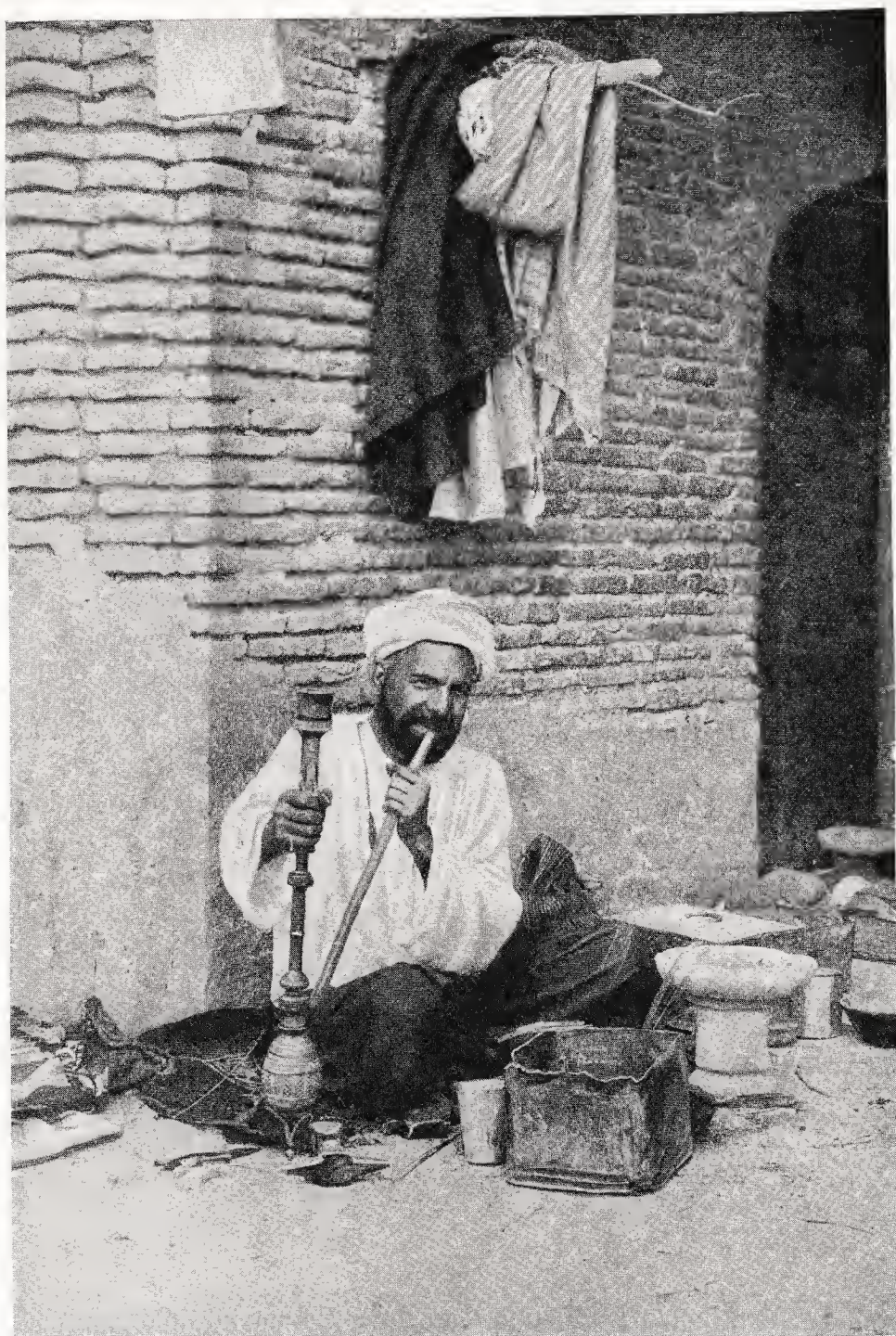
Photo, C. F. J. Galloway



TURKS OF THE ASTRABAD PROVINCE IN A VALLEY VILLAGE

The tribes inhabiting the Astrabad province on the Caspian are mainly of Turkish origin. Much of this region is given over to jungle and mountain, but the fertile valleys, where native mud hovels huddle together within encircling mud walls, produce large quantities of rice and other cereals. The greenness of the landscape is pleasant to the eye, but malaria never ceases to take its toll of victims

Photo, Sir P. Sykes



KALIAN AIDS THE PRODUCTION OF DECORATIVE DAMASCENED WORK

The artisans of modern Iran are singularly skilful in the treatment of fine metals, and inlaid work of gold and silver upon finely-tempered steel is brought to a high state of perfection. In his designs this goldsmith shows the artistic taste that has long distinguished his countrymen, and all the inspiration he requires comes to him through an occasional puff at the kalia, the smoking apparatus beside him

Photo, Major W. J. P. Rodd

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brings down any considerable volume of water to the sea, nor is there any navigable river in Persia, with the sole exception of the Karun, the utility of which is lessened by the existence of a natural barrage at Ahwaz. In the north the rivers contain more water, the Safid Rud, which pours into the Caspian Sea near Resht, being a fine river, but not navigable.

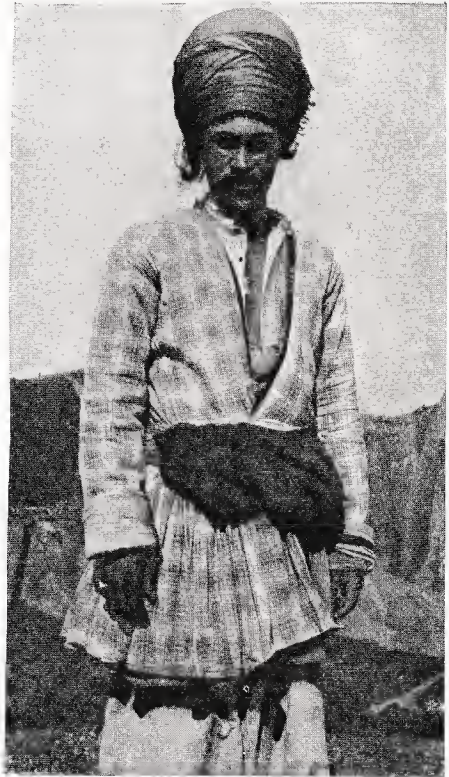
The villages are generally situated ten or twenty miles apart, and between them is barren land without water. In South Africa, the Karroo, where it takes ten acres to feed a sheep, closely resembles Persia, and it is interesting to note that Persian "fat-tailed" sheep have been introduced there with marked success. A village depends almost entirely for its crops on irrigation



TURCOMAN OF PERSIAN TERRITORY

The broad face and high cheekbones show traces of Mongol blood, and the manners of his race lack the refinement which usually distinguishes the men of pure Persian stock

Photo, R. Gorbald



SHEPHERD OF A NOMAD TRIBE

One of a band of loose-limbed, wiry hillmen, whose only wealth is derived from the flocks of goats and sheep with which they wander about the Pushtikuh highlands

Photo, A. Brett

water, which is scanty. Yet Europe owes to Persia many of its fruits and flowers—for example, the peach, the orange, the lime, and the pistachio, all of which have retained their Persian names.

The same remark applies to the myrtle, the lilac, and the narcissus. Again, Pliny tells us that the Persians introduced lucerne clover into Europe when they invaded Greece—an early example of progress on the powder cart! It is doubtful whether the vine came to Europe from the Caspian provinces, where it grows wild, but it certainly came either from this neighbourhood or from the Caucasus, which borders on it. Generally speaking, trees depend entirely on irrigation.

Persia is usually entered from the Persian Gulf, up which so many men

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READY TO CARRY ANYTHING

Still, as in old Omar's day, the Persian porter's shoulder-knot may be heard a-creaking as he cheerily earns his modest living by carrying burdens that tax even his brawny muscles

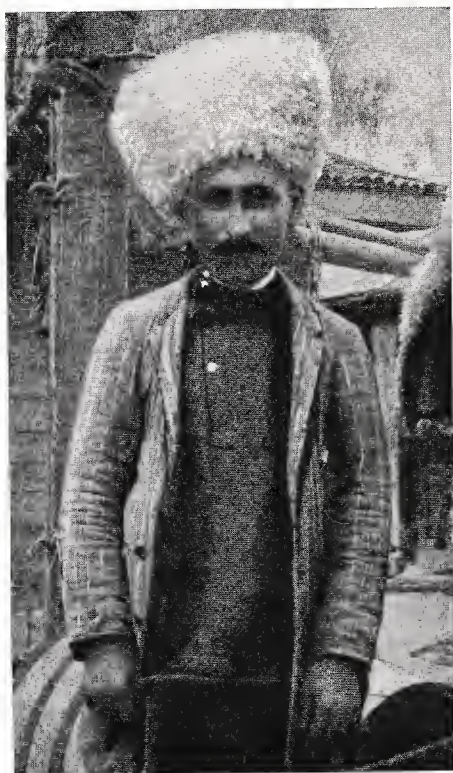
Photo, Underwood Press Service

of the British race steamed on the way to the battlefields of Irak. This body of water is of great importance, and since 1622, when the English, in alliance with Persia, captured Hormuz from the Portuguese, their influence has ever been on the side of law and order, and, entirely owing to British efforts, piracy has been abolished and the way to Irak made safe. In no part of the world have British responsibilities been faced with greater determination or success.

The Persian Gulf is entered by the straits of Hormuz or Musandam, "the Anvil." The name is well chosen, and I shall never forget the grim, black range rising sheer out of the sea. The view from the deck of the steamer when approaching the port of Bander Abbas is striking. From many miles out to

sea a great range is visible, and as the ship draws nearer, the island of Hormuz is passed, with the Portuguese fort imposing even in decay, and palm groves dotting the landscape. The town itself is picturesque from a distance, the Arab architecture being everywhere attractive, whereas, on shore, the bazaars are actually squalid, and only the motley crowd, which includes sleek Hindu traders, swaggering Afghans, and wild-looking Baluchis jostling the Arab-Negroid population, is really interesting.

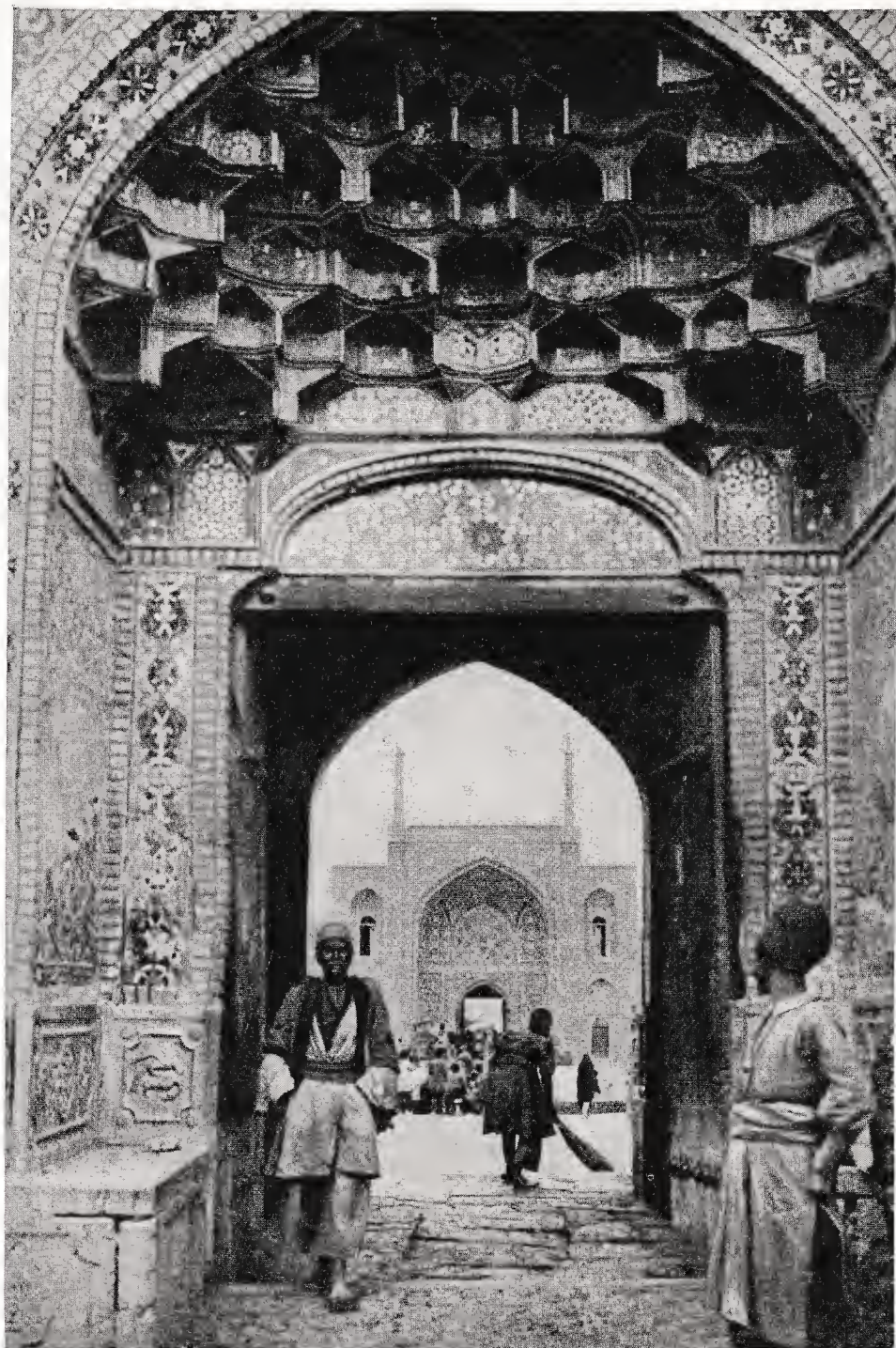
The port is protected by the islands of Hormuz and Kishm, but, even so, it is difficult to land goods on the open beach, and the little pier only runs out a very short distance. Ships have to lie about two miles out. Bushire, at the head of the Gulf, is the most important



CASPIAN ABLE-BODIED SEAMAN

About the salt waters of the Caspian, the largest inland body of water in the world, he finds his livelihood as sailor, guide, porter, and all-round handyman

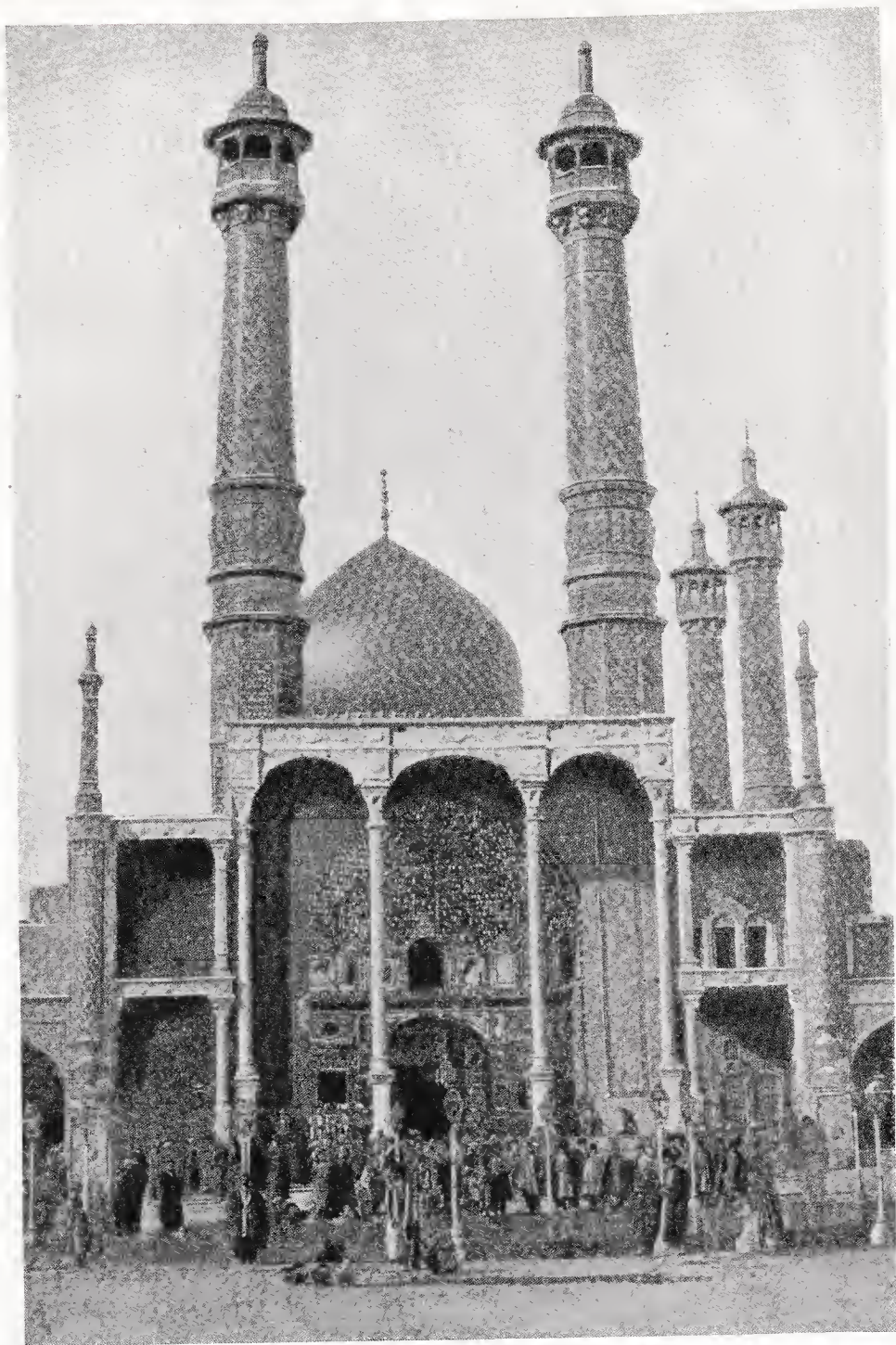
Photo, R. Gorbold



GATEWAY TO THE GOLDEN-DOMED SHRINE OF THE SAINTED FATIMA

The sacred city of Kum is a great centre of pilgrimage in Persia. Thousands flock yearly to the magnificent shrine of Fatima, who died in the city when on her way to visit her brother, the Imam Reza, at Meshed. The gateway leading to the mosque, and the mosque itself, are structures of considerable beauty, their tilework and mosaic being of exquisite quality and design.

Photo, Sir P. Sykes



BEAUTIFUL SHRINE THAT ATTRACTS AN ENDLESS PILGRIMAGE

The present mosque of Fatima at Kum has a gold-covered dome and two gold-tipped minarets in the original design, but the two huge tiled minars are of later construction. Among the faithful visiting this shrine women predominate, but the honour paid to Fatima, and to that other Fatima, her ancestress, the daughter of Mahomet, has in no way raised the status of women in the Moslem world



READY FOR THE CHASE: PERSIAN FALCONER WITH GOSHAWK

In Persia royalty and commoner have always been devoted to the chase, delighting to pursue the ibex and wild sheep in the mountains, and the fleet gazelle in the plains. Hawks, chiefly used in partridge shooting, are also trained to hunt the gazelle, and swoop down, dashing repeatedly at the head of their prey, bewildering it and checking its speed until the horsemen or hounds have overtaken it

Photo, Sir P. Sykes



ART AND CRAFT IN THE COMMERCIAL CARPET WORLD

Carpets are the most famous textile productions of Persia; their elaborate patterns, fine weaving, and tasteful blending of colours making them famous throughout the Western world. These superb creations of the hand-loom—for all are made by hand, as no machinery exists—are exposed for sale in the bazaars, where the dealer delights to display their splendours before the would-be buyer

Photo, Sir P. Sykes



CARPET MERCHANTS IN THE BAZAAR OF RESHT EXHIBITING AN EXQUISITE PRODUCTION OF THE HAND-LOOM

Always an artistic people, the modern Persians have by no means lost their sense of beauty and excel in many fine industries, especially in that of carpet-making. Small patterns are valued more highly than large ones, because they require more skilful weaving, and since old carpets are much sought after, Persians sometimes endeavour by certain doctoring to transform modern into antique productions. In the bazaars lovely carpets, their rich colours gleaming like jewels in the sunlight, may be seen on the ground for man and beast to trample at will; the dealer affirming that this drastic treatment succeeds in bringing up the pile and enhancing the colours

Photo, Major W. J. P. Reade



THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE IN PROGRESS AT TEHERAN IN THE INTERIOR OF THE COURT OF THE SHAH OF PERSIA
 Teheran replaced Ispahan as the capital of Persia about the end of the eighteenth century, and since that time has been the residence of the Shah and the seat of government. The palace is situated in the centre of the city, and covers a vast space with its groups of buildings, courtyards, and rose-gardens, all enclosed within high walls. During a theatrical performance, at which no European may be present, the Shah and princes occupy the royal box; around the stage are grouped notables of the court, while in the foreground stand closely-veiled members of the Shah's "anderoon"

Photo, Underwood Press Service



PIETY OF THE WOMAN PILGRIM OF PERSIA

Strapped to her mule she is jolted hour after hour, day after day, closely veiled despite the hot weather. But all thoughts of hardship and fatigue disappear upon arrival at her goal—the shrine of Imam Reza at Meshed

Photo, R. Gorbald

Persia, standing in relatively fertile country: Continuing our survey northwards, we come to Muhammara, situated at the point where the Karun flows into the Shatt-el-Arab. Here conditions are better, as it is generally smooth in the Karun, which is only half a mile wide at its mouth. At the same time it cannot be too clearly understood that there are no harbour works, no cranes, and no dredgers. It is true that the bar at the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab has been buoyed by the British, who have also erected wireless stations at various centres, but Persia has made no attempt to create landing or other facilities.

In the north the only important port on the Caspian is Enzeli. Here, again, Persia took no steps to develop the port and, in rough weather, passengers and cargo had frequently to be carried back to Baku, because it was impossible to land. In recent years the Russians created a port

port and the centre of British influence, for the British Resident, who maintains the Pax Britannica in the Gulf, lives at Bushire as Consul-General. It is also the headquarters of the Indo-European Telegraph Department in these torrid waters. Actually, the port, or, more correctly, landing-place, is worse than at Bander Abbas, ships having to lie several miles off shore, while there are no protecting islands.

On the other hand, the country behind is richer, Shiraz, the capital of the province of Fars, from which the name Persia is derived through the classical

at Kazian, opposite Enzeli, and joined it to Resht, the capital of the province, by a road which was continued across the Elburz Range to Kazvin and Hamadan.

One test of greatness for a nation is its communications. Here, again, Persia fails lamentably. It is pitiable, but yet true, that Persians do nothing whatever, except that they occasionally repair a broken-down bridge and immediately charge a heavy toll. A traveller might well exclaim that the engineers of Persia are its transport animals, whose hoofs have made such communications as there are. The only metalled roads

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in the country are from Julfa, on the Russian frontier, to Tabriz; from Astara on the Caspian to Ardebil; and, as already mentioned, from Enzeli to Kazvin, Hamadan, and the frontier which marches with Irak. There is also a metalled road from Teheran to Küm, which, in 1921, was being extended to Kashan when the Persian Government suddenly withdrew the concession. During the Great War the British opened up many tracks to wheeled transport or improved them for pack animals.

From the British frontier to the south of Seistan, a route four hundred miles in length was opened up to Meshed. Again, I opened up quite one thousand miles in Southern Persia, while a remarkably good track was constructed between Bushire and Shiraz, a country that has been described as a night-mare. Generally speaking, the Persian plateau is open and easy for road construction, but the ascent to it is extremely difficult.

We now come to the important question of railways. I hold strongly that there is but slight hope of Persia marching along the route of progress until her chief centres are united by railways to the outside world. Then, and not until then, will her people devote themselves to developing their country instead of ruining it by raiding and by oppression, as at present. Yet I maintain strongly that, without a subsidy, it will not pay to construct railways in Persia. The country is three times as large as France, and the population

is less than ten millions. The only railway actually constructed on Persian soil is that from Julfa to Tabriz, a length of some eighty miles. Owing to the scanty rainfall and the lack of rivers, there is no possibility of important developments in the direction of agriculture.

No minerals that it would pay to work have been found. Indeed, with the exception of the rich oilfields, that can be worked by means of pipes, Persia is singularly poor in minerals. She has no manufactures excepting carpets, so that her exports are confined to grain,



IN THE MARKET PLACE OF KAZVIN

Grapes are grown in profusion throughout Persia, and famous wines are produced, the praises of which have been sung by many an Iranian bard. From the refuse of the grapes arrack, the favourite spirit of the country, is distilled

Photo, R. Gorbald

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cotton, wool, hides, opium, dried fruits, and nuts. Her imports are considerable, and exceed her exports in value, but with the revival of her trade with Russia, which may surely be anticipated, her position will be better.

The population is divided into the sedentary inhabitants of the towns and

frequently owns a small orchard. He also finds grazing for a few sheep and goats, on whose milk he depends for cheese, clarified butter, and curds. The desert area also provides fuel, mushrooms, and rhubarb.

The peasant is well clad, and so is his wife. His huts, built of mud, cost



POTTER'S STALL AT MESHED, A HOLY CITY OF PERSIA

The celebrity of Meshed as a sacred city is due to the tomb of the Imam Reza, Persia's patron saint. It is a well-known seat of commerce as well as of devotion, being the junction of many caravan routes for Turkistan and Afghanistan. Most of the bowls and pitchers stacked on this potter's stall have been subtly wrought into shape from the muddy soil of the public highway

Photo, M. Sevruguine

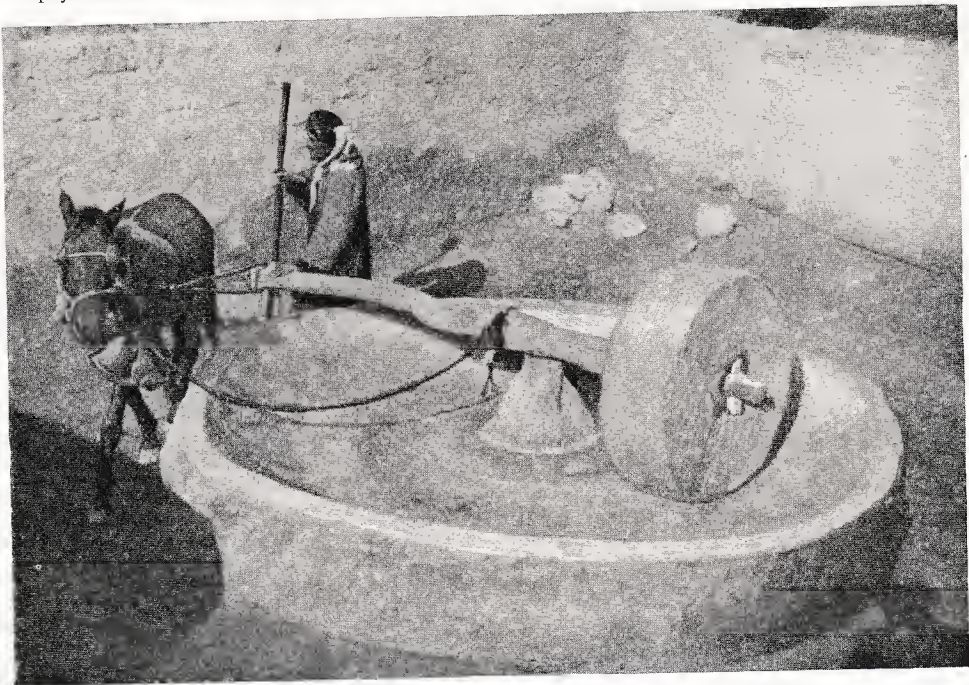
villages and the nomadic tribesmen, the latter constituting one quarter of the whole. The backbone of Persia is the patient, agricultural class, which wrings a living from grudging Nature. Owing to the scarcity of population, land-owners generally treat their tenants fairly. They supply the land, the water, and the seed; they also pay the taxes. In return they receive one half of the grain harvest. The peasant, in addition to his land for wheat, barley, and cotton,

very little, and are better than those of the Punjab villagers, who are the richest in India. His food is wheaten bread, with plenty of cheese and sour milk. He also eats large quantities of fruit and vegetables in the summer, and meat once a week in the winter. When a peasant proprietor, he makes money if grain is dear. On the other hand, he is less able to defend himself from the tax-collector, although that functionary is usually ready to accept a bribe.



HUSBANDING THE GOLDEN GRAIN OF THE PERSIAN HARVEST

Barley, the chief crop of the country, is used both as fodder for animals and food for the peasantry, wheaten bread being usually eaten only by the more prosperous of the community. Thanks to skilful irrigation, many fine crops are produced on the most unpromising soil, for the land well repays cultivation and, if irrigated, the dreariest waste can be made to blossom with rose and poppy



GRINDING THE GRAIN IN A PRIMITIVE PERSIAN MILL

A kind of feudal system flourishes in many Persian country districts, the owner of the ground finding the seed and implements, while the peasant provides the labour and is given half the produce in payment. This scene is a common one in the villages where the peasants grind the grain into powder on circular millstones, animal labour bringing the massive stone wheel into action

Photos, R. Gorboid

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Altogether, were it not for the insecurity due to raids by the tribesmen and locusts, the peasant, who is a fine, sturdy fellow, would be well off, because of the grazing and other advantages. Actually, the agricultural population is decreasing.

The townspeople live in such insanitary conditions that they have to

Church Missionary Society and American missionaries to meet this deplorable state of affairs. Even so, the physique and health of the townspeople are at a very low ebb. When I recruited for the South Persia Rifles at Kerman and Shiraz it was found that syphilis and eye complaints were almost universal in those towns. So serious was the situation that we refused to accept recruits who offered themselves, unless they produced evidence that they were villagers.

Persia being a Moslem country, alcoholic drinks are forbidden, and only the upper classes drink; but, sad to say, of late years opium smoking has increased to a terrible extent. This vice renders the smoker unreliable and careless of everything except his beloved pipe. The actual smell is almost as bad as the smoking. So much is this the case that if one member of a family smokes, in time his example will be followed by the others. Even horses, that become accustomed to their groom smoking in the stable, will lose condition for a while if a non-smoker takes his place. The children of opium-smokers are usually weak and puny.

The merchants constitute the most intelligent section of the population. They suffer terribly from the lack of security, as not only are their goods stolen by the tribesmen, but they invest their earnings in land, and, consequently, a raid may ruin them, for, if their peasants are stripped bare of stock and grain, the owner has to make good their losses to some extent, for otherwise they will desert the village and offer their services elsewhere.

Below the merchants are the shopkeepers, who sit in the bazaars in tiny shops which are stocked with very small quantities of goods. In the markets, too, the stocks appear to be very small, so that one is forced to the conclusion that profits must rule high. One curious and annoying fact is that if a large quantity of any commodity be called for, the price immediately rises,



SHROUDED IRANIAN WOMANHOOD

They glide about like spectres rather than human beings, imparting an impression of mystery and subtle elusiveness to the unvarying commonplace of Persian street life

Photo, Sir P. Sykes

bē constantly replenished from the countryside; but the system of cess-pools and of leaving dead animals and refuse to be eaten by dogs and jackals is not as bad as it would be in a wet climate. On the other hand, the absence of medical aid results in the loss of nearly all the young children from smallpox and other epidemics, although, of late years, something has been done by the



WELL-TO-DO LADY OF IRAN TAKING AN AFTERNOON SIESTA

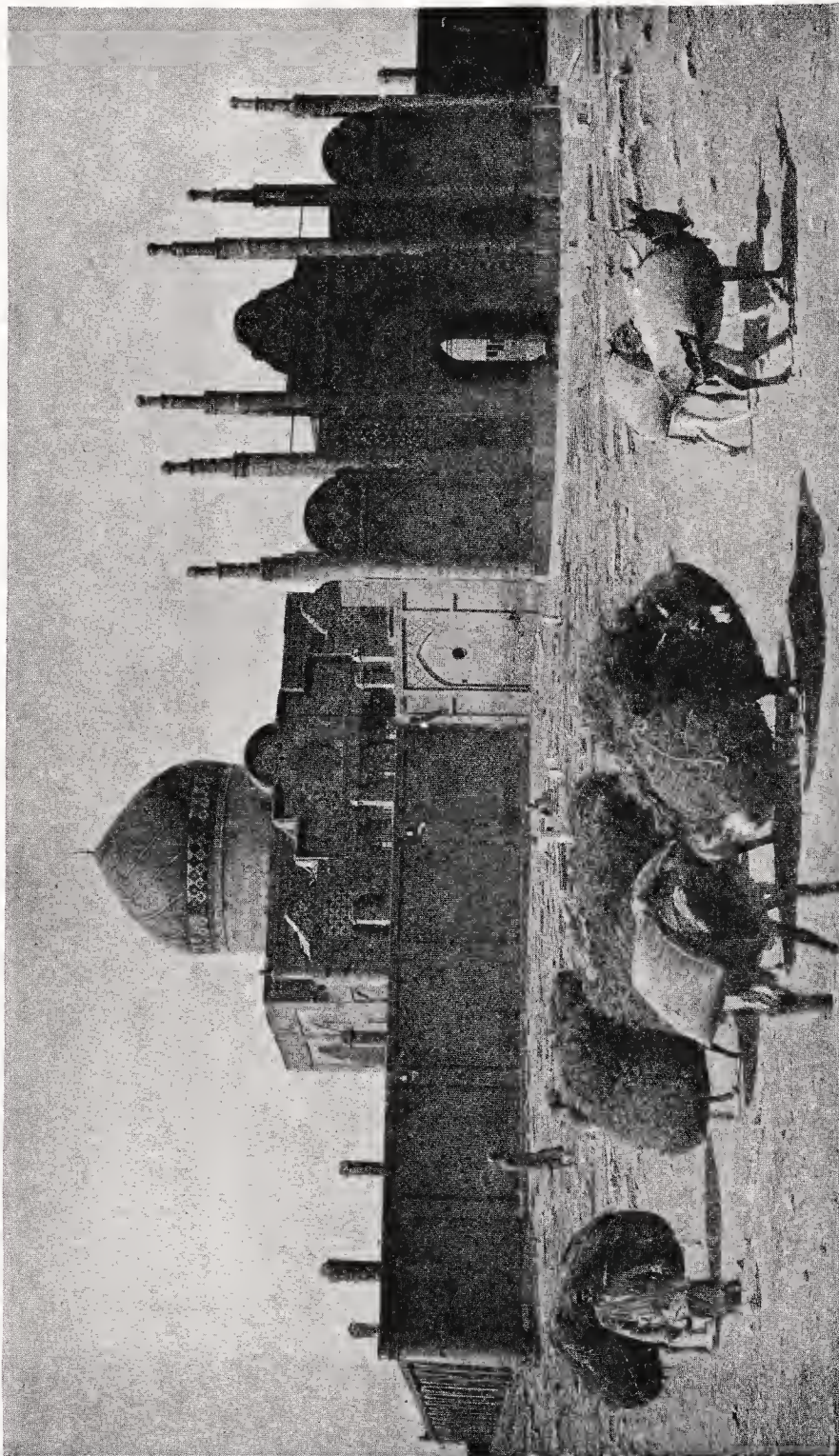
The yoke of Mahomedanism weighs heavily on the women of Persia. Their fettered existence, lacking all outside interest, and in which they depend upon themselves for amusement, is far from happy. Their indoor costume consists of short baggy garments somewhat resembling a ballet girl's dress; when taking an outing they are usually accompanied by an escort, and always shrouded from head to foot

Photo, M. Serraguine



PERSIAN WOMEN IN THE PRIVACY OF RESTRICTED SURROUNDINGS

Feminine life in Persia is passed in the seclusion of the anderoon, the compartments where the master of the house keeps his womentalk, best carpets, and choicest treasures. No man, save the husband and nearest relatives, may penetrate into these private quarters, and here the victims of Islamic law spend time in sipping sherbets or syrupy tea, smoking kalyans, and chattering without ceasing



HEAVILY-LADEN PACK-ANIMALS BRINGING BRUSHWOOD FOR USE AS FUEL INTO THE MARKET OF KAZVIN

Kazvin, situated on the road between Teheran and Tabriz, has a few imposing structures which are, however, chiefly in a state of decay, and give a somewhat dilapidated appearance to the town. Not far from its walls is Alamut, the ancient stronghold of the fanatical chief Hassan, known to the Crusaders by the title of the "Old Man of the Mountains." The Persian donkey, the usual beast of burden, spends its harassed existence in carrying bricks, manure, and brushwood, prosperous merchants and priests—under which voluminous burdens the diminutive creature is sometimes completely hidden

Photo, C. F. J. Galloway

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PRACTICAL GARB AND FOOTGEAR

The long cloak serves as a protection from the sun, and in his cotton "givas," not unlike modern bathing-shoes, he traverses the hot Persian plains in comparative comfort.

Photo, R. Gorbald

as one merchant or shopkeeper is unable to supply it. The Persian of the merchant, shopkeeper, and peasant class generally possesses good surface manners, combined with a great deal of cunning. There is little fanaticism evident, but the old women are said to be strongly anti-European.

We now come to the ruling classes, which may be divided into the religious and the landowning groups. The leading doctors of law possess great wealth and influence, all cases dealing with property being brought before them, as well as cases of divorce and so forth. Practically speaking, only criminal cases are judged by the governors, who generally gain the consent of the leading

religious authority before ordering a death sentence to be inflicted. To put this matter in another way, the religious authorities administer the "shar" or religious law and the governors the "urf," or common law. Justice is venal, and little effort is made to arrive at the truth or to administer a province in the interests of the people.

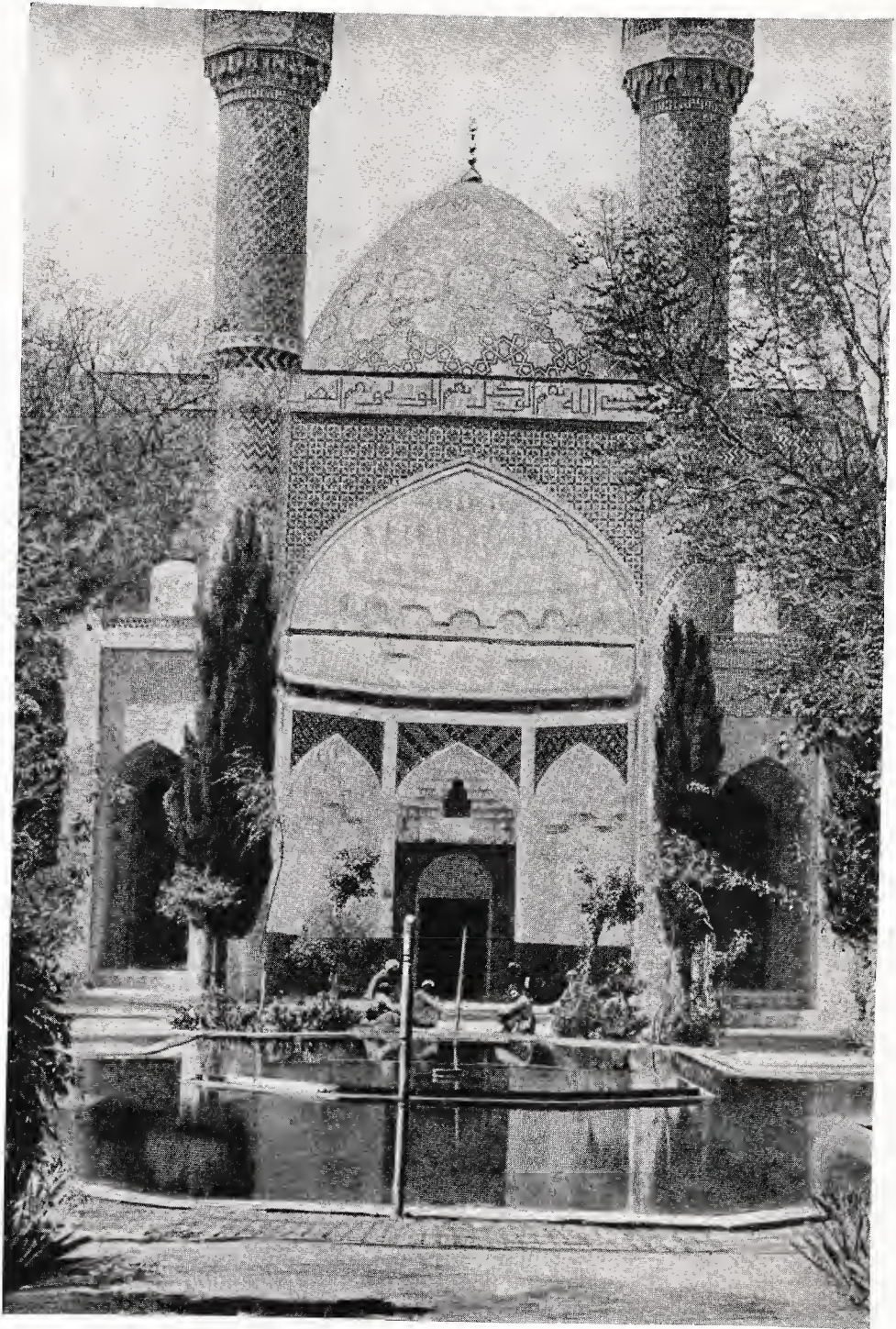
One governor informed me that, when a young man, he executed robbers with such energy that law and order were restored to the province. Upon his return to Teheran he detailed all his acts to the head of his family, expecting to win his approbation. But the old prince, his uncle, said: "You



FIRE WORSHIPPER OF YEZD

Despite the endless persecution of Zoroastrian by Mussulman, the Parsis, followers of the old national faith of Persia, have through industry and intelligence become a wealthy community.

Photo, Sir P. Sykes



INTERIOR COURT OF A SACRED RETREAT IN MAHUN

The little village of Mahun lies near the beautiful Jupar range. Its gardens, with their fountains, and cascades, numerous rose-bushes where bulbuls—the Persian nightingales—ardently trill the live-long day, stately dark-foliated cypresses, orchards, and exquisite blossoming trees, are considered some of the loveliest in the country, and are in striking contrast to the desert-land outside

Photo, Sir P. Sykes



MODEST ENTRANCE TO THE HOUSE OF A SHIRAZ MAGNATE

Shiraz, the capital of the province of Fars, is dear to every Persian heart, having produced two of the greatest poets of Iran, Hafiz and Sadi, whose tombs in the flowering outskirts are held in the highest veneration. The beautiful city, half concealed amid its gardens, has been described as "the home of Persian culture, the mother of Persian genius, the sanctuary of poetry and philosophy".



BEAUTY IN COMPLETE DISGUISE

Only when mantled from head to foot in the black chadar and white rou-band, with a strip of lacework across the eyes, does this Persian lady venture to step abroad

have governed on entirely wrong principles, for you should indeed have shown energy in capturing all robbers, but when you were dismissed from the province you should have taken money from them and released them; otherwise, if the country remains in order after your departure, a grocer's son can govern that province, to the detriment of our class." My friend, needless to say, followed this advice in the next post to which he was appointed, or which, to be more exact, he bought. It is corruption in all classes that has brought Persia so low. If a man enters any Government office and says that he will not receive bribes, his fellow-officials band together to induce him to share with them in their pickings, and should he refuse, he is forced to resign, by fair means or foul.

The nomad tribes constitute a problem that Persia is unable to solve. Splendidly virile, but addicted to raiding from

time immemorial, it requires a strong, sympathetic government to handle them. Their life is exactly that of the period of the Patriarch Abraham. They live in tents woven from goats'-hair, and move about with their flocks and herds in search of pasture. Owing to the uplands and lowlands being situated in close juxtaposition, the nomads of Fars, for example, with whom I am best acquainted, spend the winter months in the warm strip close to the Persian Gulf. They sow crops which they reap in the spring, and then move slowly northwards to the cool uplands, where they again reap crops sown in the autumn.

The route to be followed by each section of the tribe is that used for generations past, and it is an interesting sight to watch the migration. The fighting men scout far afield or seek to plunder the villages near the line of march, and so only the old men, the women, and the children are left with the flocks, on which they depend for their living.

I was deeply impressed with the numbers of sheep, goats, cattle, camels, and donkeys. The newly-born lambs or camels are all carried on pack animals, and so accustomed are their mothers to the arrangement that they make no objection. Indeed, animals are more intelligent in the East than in the West, for they live with their master and his family, instead of being shut away in fields or stables. My remarks do not apply to the dog, who is better trained in the West.

To give, as an example, the most powerful tribe in Southern Persia, the Kashgais are of Turkish origin, and settled in Fars in the fourteenth century. They are perhaps 150,000 strong, although they suffered terribly in the influenza epidemic of 1918. They are ruled by an "Ilkhani," under whom are "kalantars" of sections. They speak Turkish, but generally understand Persian. They never intermarry with the sedentary population, and thus

PERSIA & ITS PEOPLES

remain a distinct race. The Ilkhani collects the revenue due to the Persian Government, but keeps it himself unless the Government is strong. Of recent years not only has the Ilkhani kept all the revenue, but he has sent out parties to rob the villages, whose owners he blackmails, and also to raid the trade routes. So weak was the Government that if the governor-general of Fars made any objection to his actions he was able to block all the routes by which supplies were brought into Shiraz.

This caused scarcity, followed by riots. The people complained to Teheran, and the governor-general was dismissed, the Persian Government never facing the actual facts of the case. Far from so doing, the ministers accepted large presents from the Ilkhani, who was in a position to be generous to his supporters. Persians say well, "to be kind to the wolf is to be cruel to the lamb." The nomads are wolves and the peasants their prey.

It is impossible to gain an insight into Persian character without understanding



TRIO OF WEDDED WIVES OF A PERSIAN NOBLEMAN

The family tie can easily be destroyed in Persia, and a wife divorced at her husband's caprice. Although becoming rare, polygamy is still practised among those able to afford it. According to the Mahomedan law a man may have four permanent wives; no limit being placed on the number of divorces and re-marriages, provided he finds himself at no time with more than four



COUNTRY MUD-HOUSES OF THE PERSIAN IN THE MAKING

The little mud villages scattered about the bleak plains or the base of long jagged mountain ranges are all one neutral tint of brown—weirdly-shaped excrescences of the same soft-toned material as that on which they stand. Unless almost new, the buildings are invariably in a tumble-down condition, but fifty years is the outside length of time that a Persian requires his house to stand



PERSIAN BRICK-CUTTER AT WORK FACING UP SUN-DRIED BRICKS

Mud bricks invariably have an admixture of chopped kah, or straw, added as a binding material. During their bondage in Egypt the Israelites were chiefly employed in brick-making, and their request for straw to make their bricks proves that they were conversant with the method, and found straw a necessary addition to the insufficiently cohesive mud drawn from the banks of the River Nile

Photos, G. B. Hopkins

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their religion. The state religion of Persia for many centuries was that preached by Zoroaster, who lived more than 2,500 years ago. He taught that Ahura Mazda was the one supreme God, that there was a constant struggle between Good and Evil, and that, in the end, Good would triumph. This fine old religion, which inculcated "good thoughts, good words, good deeds," is still believed by 10,000 Persians who reside at Yezd and Kerman, and by 100,000 Persians in India, who are termed Parsis.

The rise of Islam in the seventh century changed the old world. Persia first felt the influence of the fanatical Arabs, who overthrew her great empire within a very few years. Subjugated, the nation gradually adopted the new religion, but its heart was with the old royal line of the Sassanians. At last all was well, for Hussein, son of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, is believed to have married Shahrbanu, the daughter of the last Sassanian monarch.

The Persians thereupon adopted Ali as their divine and spiritual leader, and claimed for his descendants, the twelve Imams, the same divine right that had belonged to the Sassanian dynasty. In other words, they considered that the descendants of Hussein inherited the "Divine Splendour" of the Sassanians. In pursuance of this train of thought, the Persians became Shia, or "Separatists," as opposed to the Sunni, or "Traditionists." The latter, who are in a large majority, which includes the Moslems of India and Turkey, acknowledged all the caliphs, including Ali, whereas the former considered the first three caliphs to be usurpers, and held that Ali, whom they placed above the Prophet, was the first legitimate caliph and successor to Mahomet.

The tragic fate of Hussein did perhaps more than anything else to establish the new sect. He was invited by the inhabitants of the powerful city of Kufa to assert his rights to the Caliphate, and set out from Mecca with his wife and family and a very small body of

adherents. The fickle Kufans deserted him basely, and he was attacked by overwhelming forces and slain in battle.

The victor showed great brutality to the dead, and the tragedy of Kerbela became the subject of Passion plays which annually excite the nation to a white heat of religious fervour. I have



BRICKLAYER PLYING HIS TRADE

The Persians are remarkably clever in the manipulation of mud, and not only their houses but many vessels are fashioned from the soft soil taken from their thoroughfares

Photo, Sir P. Sykes

been present at these plays, and have felt moved by the depth of the tragedy that is shown and also by the genuine emotion that is displayed. So long as these plays are acted Persia will remain apart from, and hostile to, her Sunni neighbours.

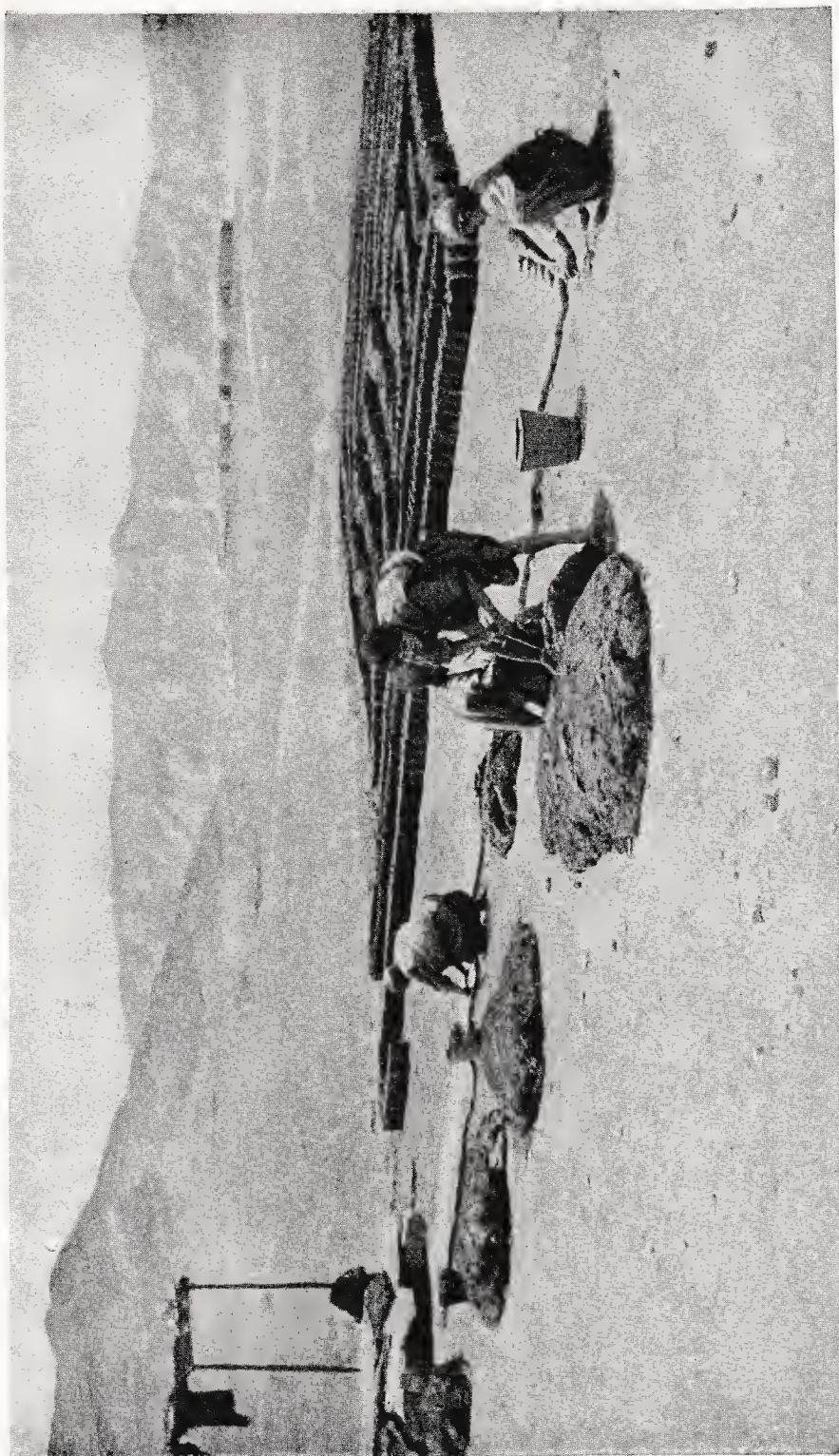
Since her foundation as a great empire Persia has been governed through



PERSIAN LABOURERS ENGAGED IN MIXING THE CLAY FOR MAKING SUN-DRIED BRICKS

All the civilized nations of antiquity were skilful in brick-making, and over 6,000 years ago the Babylonians built their dwellings of burnt bricks. To this day adobes, or sun-dried bricks, of which the Great Wall of China was partly constructed, are used extensively by many Eastern races. In Persia they prevail in the construction of both town and village habitations. The clay is collected indiscriminately from all sides; large holes are noticeable about the roads, and even in the big towns no compunction is shown in digging up the public highway to obtain mud to make these sun-dried bricks

Photo, G. B. Hopkins



MOULDING THE PLASTIC MUD INTO BRICKS AND SPREADING THEM IN THE SUN TO DRY

The process of making the sun-dried bricks is easy in the extreme. A pit or hole is prepared in which mud, chopped straw, and water are deposited in suitable quantities; the whole being then thoroughly mixed until of the proper consistence, when it is removed, moulded into bricks, and left to bake in the hot rays of the sun. The mud dwellings of Persia are by no means of an enduring order, wet weather plays havoc with them, and the best-built town house would remain standing little more than a fortnight if exposed to a less dry climate

Photo, G. B. Hopkins



SULPHUR BURNING : PEASANTS PREPARING A PRIMITIVE KILN

Though Persia is not without certain mineral wealth, very little is done to tap the resources of the country, a fact chiefly due to the lack of communications. Some of the natives, however, have their own methods of exploitation, and two are here seen building a kiln for the purpose of burning the sulphurous minerals which are available in most of the volcanic districts



DISMANTLING A KILN AFTER THE SULPHUR HAS BEEN FIRED

When the kiln is opened, the twigs are found thickly coated with sulphur, most of the impurities having been dissipated by simple vaporisation. The coating of sulphur adhering to the twigs can be easily chipped off and collected for use. The sulphur is principally used in the manufacture of crude gunpowder, a necessity for the maintenance of life and property in most parts of Persia

Photos, G. B. Hopkins



WATCHING A KILN DURING THE PROCESS OF BURNING THE SULPHUR
 Above the sulphur ore, deposited in a hole in the ground, twigs are piled which are covered over with mud plastered on top. The ore containing the sulphur is then slowly burnt with very little air, and the sulphur vapour gradually condenses on the twigs, thus producing pure sulphur, separated from the other minerals and impurities of which the ore is composed

Photo, G. B. Hopkins



MARKETERS CROSSING A CORNER OF THE GREAT WATERLESS LUT

Astride their pack animals, and exposed to the merciless rays of the desert sun, they are making their way over a part of the great treeless, arid region known as the Lut, which occupies the centre of Persia. This desert, said to have been in times long ago an inland sea, cuts the country completely in half, and hinders free communication and commerce to a considerable extent

Photo, Sir P. Sykes

governors appointed by the Shah. These officials were obedient to Cyrus the Great, or to any powerful monarch, but enjoyed virtual independence if the Shah was weak. I have referred to the Lut, which, for all practical purposes, broke up Persia into a congeries of provinces. It was a very far cry from the capital, say, to Seistan, and still farther to Baluchistan. And so the empire hung together in a very loose fashion. The position, however, changed for

the better when the British constructed the Indo-European telegraph line across Persia from the frontier near Tabriz to Teheran, and thence southwards to Kum, Kashan, Ispahan, Shiraz, and Bushire. From that port a cable ran down the Gulf to Jask, whence there was communication with Karachi both by a land line and by cable. Early in the twentieth century a second line was constructed from Kashan through Yezd and Kerman to Bam. Thence it



FRANKNESS AND FREEDOM AMONG SEMI-CIVILIZED LARISTAN NOMADS

Health and vigour envelop the women of these untamed tribes, who boldly face the world, the picture of jaunty independence. Their refined and carefully-guarded sisters despise them for thus openly showing their features, but these wanderers know nothing of the discontent so prevalent among the Persian women cloistered in silken seclusion, and to them freedom is the keynote of their existence

Photo, A. Brett



ONE OF THE LAWS OF THE MEDES AND PERSIANS THAT ALTERETH NOT

No matter how charming a figure a Persian woman may possess, she looks but a shapeless bundle when shrouded in her outdoor costume. The Persians say that the veiling order in Islam came about because a passing Arab, admiring the beauty of Ayesha, Mahomet's favourite wife, offered a camel in exchange for her; the irate husband thereupon established this decree

Photo, M. Sevraguine

crossed the Lut to the British frontier of Baluchistan and ran across that desert province to Karachi.

Other lines were also constructed for the Persian Government. There is no doubt that these telegraph lines were of great benefit to Persia. They were popularly believed to end at the foot of the throne, and in consequence Persians who were oppressed by their governors took sanctuary in the offices and petitioned Teheran until their wrongs were redressed. Apart from this the British officials of the telegraph department rendered most valuable services both in giving Persians news of the outer

world and in reporting through their directors to the Persian Government the actual truth about events. They were often the means of stopping much bloodshed, and were trusted by all classes. Finally, the Government could convey its orders rapidly.

There is a Persian proverb that a fish decays from its head. This applies to Persia. The Government is generally composed of men who wish to amass huge fortunes as quickly as possible, Teheran being full of the palaces of such officials. One of the most wealthy was said to weep bitterly at night and to lament a wasted day if he had not

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made one thousand pounds. When a governor is appointed to a province he is bound to pay large sums to the Shah and to the ministers, also to his friends who have acted as intermediaries in the negotiations. He then proceeds to his province, accompanied by relations and dependents, none of whom is paid, but all of whom have to be provided with posts.

Upon his arrival, gifts—which consist of money, horses, carpets, and so forth—are received, especially from the sub-governors or from those who wish for posts. Notice is then given that everyone is dismissed from his post, and much bargaining takes place, as almost every official, however petty, is affected. Needless to say, the wretched subjects suffer in any case, for they either receive back a governor who has had to pay heavily for the post, or else a new and very hungry ruler. Persians prefer to

have as governor a local grandee, as he has to live in the province and is, therefore, to some extent, reasonable, whereas a Teheran notable makes all the hay he can in a short time. One detestable custom is to sell a post and then, in two or three months' time, to dismiss the occupant and resell it to someone else. This is, of course, very profitable to the governor.

The revenue is fixed on lists drawn up a century ago, and takes no notice of changes in population. For example, a village may have dwindled in size owing to one of its watercourses having run dry, but no allowance is made for this. Or, again, a new village may have been founded, and so long as a bribe is given in the right quarter, this village is never asked to pay revenue. When the revenue is paid in the governor makes out large bills for expenses, such as imaginary expeditions against robbers



WEAVERS AT A HAND-LOOM IN A PERSIAN CARPET FACTORY

In the carpet factories the pattern is dictated by an overseer who carefully studies the design he holds, while the workers deftly twist and knot the strands of coloured worsted according to his directions. Among the weavers is a large percentage of children, many of whom are crippled and diseased from the cramped positions and the damp, unhealthy atmosphere in which they work

Photo, M. Sevruguine



PEACEFUL SCENE OF PASTORAL LIFE AMONG THE HILLS OF NORTH-WEST PERSIA OVERLOOKING HAMADAN

For the most part the region is sterile and barren of vegetation, save for some small patches of green fertility lying about the stony flanks of the mountains. Driving their animals from one meagre pasturage to another, the herdsmen pass long days in these vast solitudes, where their cattle, and perhaps a vulture slowly wheeling in the sky, are the only living creatures to be seen. Behind this rocky range lies Hamadan, a town famous for its strong white wine, and as occupying the site of past glories, to which the tombs of Esther and Mordchai—a place of pilgrimage for countless Jews—bear silent witness

Photo, Major W. J. P. Rodd



TWO OF A BAND OF ITINERANT MUSICIANS

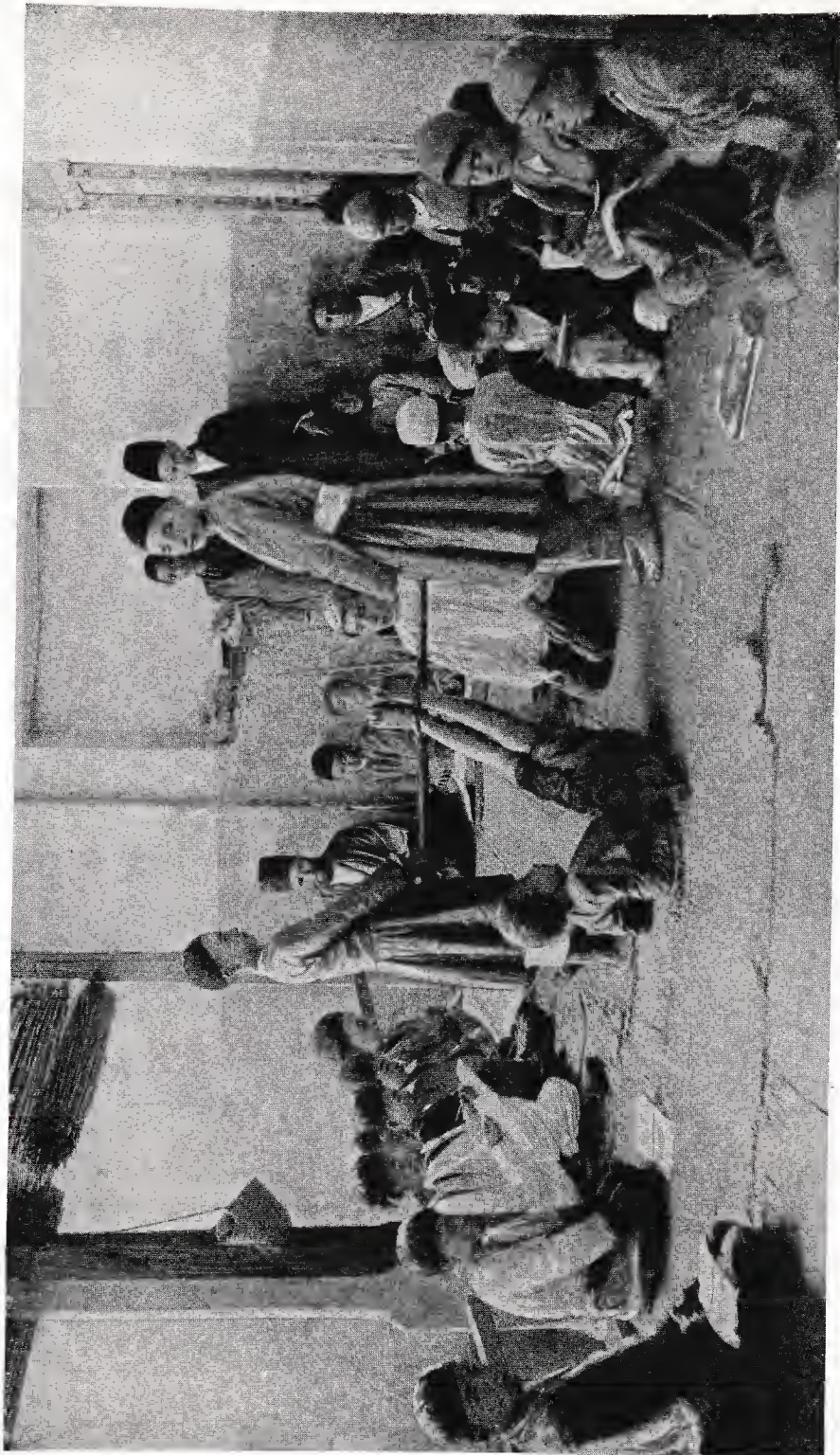
Though distinctly of a barbaric nature, there is something strangely haunting about Persian music. Wild and tuneless as it may appear to the European, heard from a distance, it conjures up some of the mystery and glamour of the Orient. The large tambourine-like instrument is tapped on incessantly during a performance, while the curious pipe emits fearfully discordant sounds

Photo, Sir P. Sykes

and so forth, with the result that very little money reaches Teheran.

There is also the Government estate. The governor profits by declaring that the crops were much less than in fact they were, and he states that he has sold the grain at a much lower price than that prevailing at the time. One

governor used to say frankly that as the ministers embezzled most of the money that reached Teheran, he was determined to take all he could. Other sources of profit are found in selling justice, in making false charges against innocent people, and in releasing criminals upon payment.



LUCKLESS LAZINESS IN A PERSIAN SEMINARY PAYS THE PENALTY BY UNDERGOING THE BASTINADO MODE OF PUNISHMENT
The bastinado, the rudimentary instrument of Persian justice, is applied to the highest as well as the lowest in the land. Should he be unlucky enough to offend the Shah, a nobleman may be liable to this castigation, a refractory servant will have it meted out to him by his master, a lazy pupil by an irate teacher. The culprit is thrown on his back, and his feet, held high in the air by means of loops fastened to a pole, are beaten with supple wands—a punishment to which the hard soles of the ordinary offender are so inured that he prefers to "eat sticks" rather than pay a fine

Photo, M. Serraguine

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The old Persian army possesses no military value. Its material is frequently good, being drawn from the country districts, but its officers are hopelessly corrupt. The men are merely given rations of bread. Large numbers are posted as permanent guards at the houses of officials and of their own officers, where they receive small allowances or perquisites. During the revolution in 1906, and again in 1909, their influence was nil. When these men have been away from their homes for some time they collect a sum of money to secure the regiment being temporarily disbanded.

Some years ago the colonel of a regiment approached the commander-in-chief with an offer of one thousand tomans (nominally about £200) to purchase this concession. That high official was very ill—indeed, he was dying—and his attendants waved the colonel back. The commander-in-chief, however, signalled for the officer to approach—he was too far gone to speak—and when the offer of one thousand tomans was made he shook two skinny fingers at him to signify that the offer must be doubled, and while shaking his fingers he died!

Persia's Foreign Legions

The only force of any military value is the Cossack brigade, which was raised by the Russians a generation ago. It behaved badly in the presence of the Bolsheviks in 1920, and took refuge in the lines of a British brigade that was then stationed in North Persia. The Russian officers resigned, and not long after the Cossacks marched on Teheran and seized the reins of power. The South Persia Rifles, which I raised during the war, was maintained until the summer of 1921 at the expense of the British Government. It rendered admirable service to the Persian Government, maintaining good order in South Persia, and even capturing two powerful robber bands in the Ispahan province. The Persian Government at first

agreed to take over the force with some British officers, but finally other counsels prevailed, and the entire force was disbanded in the autumn of 1921. There was a third force—to wit, the gendarmerie, raised by Swedish officers. This body possessed some military value, and it is now being absorbed into the Cossack division, although not without trouble, the detachment at Tabriz having mutinied and attacked the Cossacks.

Unintelligent Education

Persia has frontiers of great length to guard. She has also a very turbulent population to control. The upper class has lost its manhood and will not face death in the field, so that a Persian force organized by corrupt officers who would never lead their men in action can neither protect the frontiers nor secure internal tranquillity.

Education in Persia is defective from almost every point of view. When a boy reaches the age of six he is usually placed in the hands of a male teacher, and separated to a considerable extent from his mother. This is perhaps as well, for a male child is usually spoiled by her, whereas little notice is taken of girls. The old-fashioned teaching which is still in vogue, except where European influence makes itself felt, is to teach the letters. After that, the first chapter of the Koran is learned by heart in Arabic, together with the Persian equivalents for each phrase. The unfortunate pupil is too young to understand what he is being taught, with the result that he learns like a parrot.

A Lesson in Translation

Nor are the teachers in the least efficient. When I studied Arabic my professor insisted on my translating the word "mann" as quails, whereas I told him that it was the English word "manna." A reference to the dictionary proved that I was right, with the result that my old teacher lamented with tears that for forty years he had made this mistake, and would, even now, have great difficulty in checking himself!

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In addition to the Koran, simple sums of addition are taught and a few facts about the world, which are generally inaccurate. For example, Persians always teach that London is the name of the country inhabited by the British, and frequently state that "Atlantic" is applied to a great city in Europe. Persia owes much to the various missionary societies who have founded schools at the chief centres. Even more good has been accomplished by medical missions, for Persians admire their cleanliness, their order, and, above all, the unwearying effort made to cure

them. They undergo these influences at a time when they are susceptible to them, and if, as her friends hope, Persia shakes off the shackles of corruption, vice, and sloth, the missionaries will deserve the chief credit.

In a sense, every European who lives in Persia is a power for good or for evil, and one possession of the British is a reputation for truth, which is of great value. The Great War has undoubtedly raised British prestige and also that of Indian troops. Persians despised the "thin-legged" Indians, but since they defeated the Kashgais in 1918, although



WANDERING WOMEN OF THE WILD KURDISH TRIBES

Though classed as Iranians, the Kurds are somewhat of a puzzle to ethnologists. Among the hills they enjoy a quasi-independence, and are greatly feared by the inhabitants of the plains, who are frequently subjected to their harassing incursions. As pack and draught animals their mules are invaluable, and these wiry beasts appear to flourish on the coarse herbage of the Persian uplands

assailed by vastly superior numbers, Persians readily acknowledge their valour.

When a boy reaches the age of sixteen it is considered high time for him to marry. It may be said at once that there are very few bachelors or spinsters in Persia, and that is certainly as it should be. Polygamy, of course, provides for any superfluous women, while youths are married before they are old enough to have much of a say in the matter. Unfortunately, the custom prevails of marrying cousins in order to prevent property going out of the family, and also because a relation will naturally be happier than a stranger in the house of her mother-in-law. The results are very bad from a physical point of view, as has been proved in many parts of the world.

Persians are loath to give up their old customs, and it is still usual for brothers to arrange intermarriage on the largest possible scale, cases being common of large families intermarrying entirely with their cousins. The marriage ceremonies are very interesting, and include the bestowal of many gifts. The bridegroom sends a tray with one hundred different varieties of drugs and herbs. He also sends a mirror and white sheeting to cover the bride during the ceremony. A pair of candlesticks and a number of pairs of shoes are also usually included. These gifts are, of course, given in addition to gifts of jewelry. The actual ceremony consists in the



WELL VERSED IN MOUNTAIN BRIGANDAGE

As rugged and untamed in character as the hilly regions of north-western Persia where they dwell, the Kurds, by their fierce aspect and war-like propensities, have established for themselves a reputation of which depredation and violence are conspicuous features

Photo, R. Gorbald

representative of the bridegroom, who is generally a doctor of law, proceeding to the outside of the room in which the bride and her female relations and friends are assembled. He remains behind the curtain and asks the bride if she accepts the bridegroom. At first there is no reply, the bride being naturally shy. But finally she gives her consent. To make sure, a lady of



AT HOME WITH THE LAWLESS INHABITANTS OF A LUR VILLAGE IN LURISTAN

Among the three million nomads that roam the bleak and mountainous surface of Persia are some 24,000 Lurs, a primitive wild people—real children of Nature—who chiefly inhabit the rugged region of Luristan. Rude and savage in most of their ways, they are especially notorious as robbers, and would show little compunction in murdering their victims, should these make an attempt to fight for their possessions. They enjoy life in their rough-and-tumble way, are contented with the poorest of shelters for their dwellings, and with such food and clothing as they can obtain by fair means or foul

Photo, A. Brett

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position who is known to be present is requested to confirm the fact that it is the bride who has replied, and when this is done the agent of the bridegroom returns to the assembly of the men, and the contract, which constitutes the legal ceremony, is completed. Much feasting then follows in the separate rooms.

At a late hour of the night the bridegroom's party starts off to meet that of the bride, both parties being accompanied by musicians, while fireworks are let off. The bride, who generally rides, takes some bread and salt in her hand with which to start her new home. She is welcomed at the house of the bridegroom, who, for the



INFIDEL OF PERSIA

The dress restrictions imposed upon the remnant of Zoroastrians have not deprived the women of a singularly effective costume



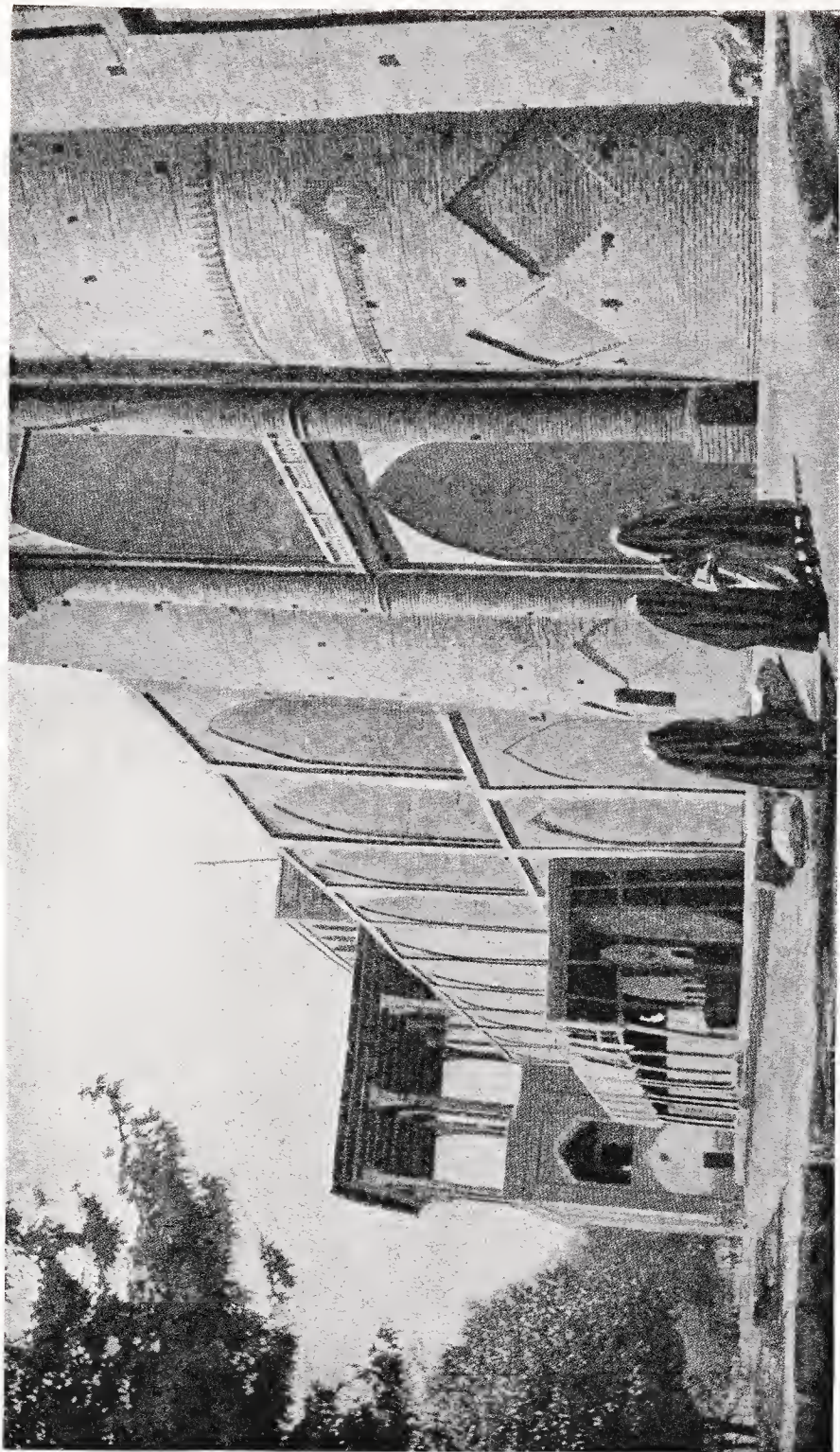
IN A TURCOMAN CAMP OF NORTH KHORASSAN

An independent, brave people, with an innate aversion to restraint, the Turcomans, among whom a strong bond of brotherhood prevails, prefer to spend their days in freedom away from the regulated routine and harsh methods of large Persian cities

Photos. Sir P. Sykes

first time, sees his wife when he removes her veil, unless he is a relation, in which case he will have known her as a child. Both sit down to partake of the food brought by the bride, each feeding the other, and the bride refuses to speak until she receives a further gift of jewelry.

At last the ceremonies end, and the young couple receive the compliments of the parents and female relations and friends, and, in Persian stories, the nightingale in the rose-bushes bursts out into an ecstasy of song.



GATEWAY OF THE RUINED PALACE OF SHAH ABBAS, A REMNANT OF THE BYGONE SPLENDOURS OF A GOLDEN AGE
Isfahan, the old capital of Persia, is full of the traditions of that great warrior and administrator Shah Abbas, the contemporary of the English Queen Elizabeth. So lasting an impression did he make on his country that nearly every structure of note is ascribed to his enterprise; and it has been said that "When this prince ceased to live, Persia ceased to prosper." From the porch-pavilion in the background, overlooking the Maidan, or Royal Square, Shah Abbas and his court were wont to watch royal tournaments when the Persian nobility engaged in a national game, now popular on British soil as polo

Photo, Harold F. Weston

Persia

II. Its Past Grandeur and Present Predicament

By Sir Percy Sykes, K.C.I.E.

Author of "History of Persia, etc.

THE beginnings of Persian history are wrapped in legend, but we reach firm ground with Cyrus the Great, who was the founder of the Persian empire. He belonged to the Achaemenian family which ruled in the provinces of Fars and Arabistan, and in 550 B.C. he conquered the neighbouring tribe of the Medes. He then started out on an amazing career of conquest.

First of all he marched westwards to the limits of the kingdom of the Medes in Asia Minor. There he met the famous Croesus of Lydia, whom he overthrew, capturing Sardis. This conquest brought Persia into direct contact with the Greeks of Asia Minor, whom he subdued without much trouble. He then marched eastwards for perhaps two thousand miles and annexed vast provinces in Central Asia up to the borders of India. Finally, he reached the zenith of his fame by the capture of great Babylon.

Cyrus was the first great Aryan who is known to us in the pages of Isaiah and of Herodotus. The Jewish prophets praised the Persians, and we read, "Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus whose right hand I have holden." Indeed he was a splendid figure, merciful and just, with a sane outlook that was unknown among the rulers of Babylon or Assyria.

The next great ruler of this mighty Achaemenian dynasty was Darius. He ruled Asia from the Punjab to the desert beyond Egypt and organized his empire with great skill. His successors were men of little ability. Xerxes, his son, was defeated by the Greeks at Salamis, one of the decisive battles of the world, and then withdrew into the heart of his empire, to Susa, the Shushan of the Book of Esther, in which we read of Xerxes under the name of Ahasuerus.

For many generations after the repulse from Greece Persia remained a great power, but gradually decay set in, mainly owing to a surfeit of luxury. At this juncture there appeared on the stage of history one who was

perhaps its greatest actor, for the fame of Alexander exceeds that of all other men. His father, Philip, was also a very great ruler and soldier, and it was he who organized that wonderful army, with its irresistible heavy cavalry and the famous phalanx, which could break through all opposition.

Alexander set out in the spring of 334 B.C. to overthrow the Persian empire with a force of only 40,000 men, and, crossing the Hellespont, where he held a fort on each side of the straits, he defeated the Satrap, although not without hard fighting. Gradually he annexed and began to administer Asia Minor, and, at Issus, close to the modern Alexandretta, he overthrew the enormous host of the craven Darius Codomannus and won the lordship of Asia, for as Darius fled from Issus, it was certain that his troops would never again face the Macedonians.

Alexander occupied Babylon, Susa, Persepolis, and Ecbatana in turn. He beat the bounds of the Persian empire and crossed the five rivers of the Punjab. He then returned to Susa down the Indus and across the deserts of Baluchistan. When he died at the early age of thirty-two, he had organized his conquests so well that his generals were able to found dynasties and rule over the Persian Empire for many generations. Alexander represented the



THE KINGDOM OF PERSIA

PERSIA : HISTORICAL SKETCH

culminating point of Greek civilisation. The next dynasty to appear on the scene was a nomad tribe from the plains to the south-east of the Caspian Sea. These Parthians acquired a veneer of Greek civilization and used coins with Greek inscriptions. They gradually built up a powerful empire and fought Rome on almost equal terms for many centuries. Who does not remember reading of the crushing defeat they inflicted on Crassus in 53 B.C. ? Indeed, Roman history cannot be properly studied without some knowledge of events in Persia.

Period of the Sassanid Dynasty

In the middle of the third century of our era a national dynasty, termed the Sassanid, arose and took up the position occupied by Parthia. Indeed, the Sassanids were even more warlike than the Parthians, or, perhaps, it would be more correct to say that they were better organized. Their culminating feat of arms was the defeat of a Roman army and the capture of the Emperor Valerian, a theme which is portrayed in bas-relief sculptures in many parts of Persia.

The Sassanid dynasty was often pressed hard by tribes from Central Asia, and on this subject more light would be welcome. However, we know something about the invasions of the White Huns and, later, of the Turks. The last great monarch of the dynasty was Chosroes Parvez, who nearly captured Constantinople. He sacked Jerusalem and carried off the "True Cross," an act which stirred Christendom to its depths and rallied the people round the Emperor Heraclius, who engaged in a series of remarkable campaigns, which resulted in the final defeat of Persia. Actually both combatants were worn out and fell easy victims to the new power that arose in the deserts of Arabia.

A Province of the Caliphate

The rise of Islam is one of the most remarkable events in history. Within a few years the Arabs, who were, for perhaps the first time in their history, welded into a nation, overthrew the Persian empire, albeit the Persians fought stoutly. They also drove the erstwhile victorious Heraclius out of the rich provinces of Syria. Once the armies of the hapless Sassanid monarch were defeated little resistance was offered to the conquerors, except in the densely wooded Caspian provinces, which, under local princes, maintained their independence for more than a century.

Persia became a mere province of the wide-spreading empire of the Caliphate, and it seemed as if her national spirit might be lost. But her genius asserted

itself in a most remarkable manner. Persians became Moslems indeed, but they chose their own spiritual leader in the person of Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mahomet. They believed that his son Hussein married a daughter of the last Sassanid monarch, and that his descendants thereby inherited the almost sacred virtues of their beloved dynasty, that were summed up in the term "royal splendour."

Acting on this theory, they invented the theory that the descendants of Ali were Imams, or spiritual and temporal leaders by divine right. Further, they believe that the twelfth Imam is still alive, and will, one day, reappear as the Mahdi, or Guide, to establish justice on earth. Followers of these doctrines are termed Shiites or "Separatists" from the main body of Moslems, termed Sunnites or "Traditionists."

Under the Arab yoke the Persians were treated with arrogance and contempt, but, as the centuries passed, Persia reasserted her intellectual superiority and her higher civilization, and the majority of the Arabs returned to their nomadic life. Towards the end of the ninth century of our era a national dynasty arose in remote Seistan. It was followed by other local dynasties, some of which carved out empires, but they were all swept away by the Seljuks, a Turkish tribe from the East which ruled over practically the whole of the Caliphate while acknowledging the spiritual authority of the Caliph.

Fire and Sword from Mongolia

The Seljuks were recent converts to Islam, which religion they revitalised. It was they who defended Asia against the invasion called the Crusades. Curiously enough, the Normans, who were the chief leaders of Europe, were also comparatively recent converts to Christianity, but, in the long run, the Moslems defeated their assailants, who were operating from bases in distant lands.

From one point of view the history of Persia consists of a series of invasions from the East. The Seljuk empire rapidly decayed, and comparatively small states succeeded to it when the most awful human avalanche was set in motion, by the Mongols marching west. The leader of these fiends in human form was Jenghiz Khan, who in 1219 entered Central Asia and began to massacre the entire population, his idea being to make his line of communication safe and also to convert the entire land into pasturage for the herds of his followers.

In Persia the Mongols ruined and massacred in the north, but the southern provinces fortunately escaped. After the first wave of conquest Hulaku Khan, a

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member of the reigning family, was ordered to extirpate the Caliphate. This he did without much difficulty, the Caliph being a miser, who would not unlock the doors of his treasury. The sack of Bagdad was a mortal blow to Islam. Incidentally, the massacre of thousands of learned men dealt an equally heavy blow to the supremacy of the Arab language.

The descendants of Hulaku formed a Persian dynasty and were converted to Islam. Under their rule ambassadors were sent to the kings of Europe, and letters that were exchanged between Ghazan Khan of Persia and Edward I. of England are still in existence, the purport of the correspondence being cooperation against the common foe in Palestine.

Tamerlane, the next great conqueror to appear on the stage of Central Asia, has impressed mankind more than any of his Asiatic predecessors. Born a member of a small tribe of Turks, he rose to power slowly but surely until he had gained a vast empire. At the age of seventy he won his greatest victory by defeating and capturing Sultan Bayazid, the famous monarch of Turkey. We fortunately possess a vivid account of Tamerlane from a contemporary pen, and there is no doubt that he was a very great man, always ready for action, and never allowing his ministers to decide for him. His descendants inaugurated a brilliant era of art which, in some respects, has never been equalled in medieval or modern Europe.

English Blades for Persia's Foes

The most illustrious scion of this dynasty was Babar, who conquered India and founded the Mogul empire. At the very end of the sixteenth century a national dynasty, known as the Safavid, arose similar to that of the Sassanids and descended from that stock. It reached its zenith under Shah Abbas, a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth. At that period the Shirley brothers, who were English knights, took service with the Shah and organised an army which defeated the Turks and raised his prestige to a great height.

Ispahan was made the capital and became a city of palaces, many of which still survive, the finest being the Hall of Audience, where the monarch sat in state and received embassies. At this period the English appeared in the Persian Gulf and, in 1622, in cooperation with Persia, captured the great Portuguese stronghold of Hormuz, that is immortalised in "Paradise Lost." Since that date England has played a splendid role in the Persian Gulf, suppressing piracy at the cost of much blood. At the same time

her commerce steadily increased, more especially that of her Indian subjects.

The Safavid dynasty was held to be sacred, and so, when it became effete, it was not supplanted by an internal movement. Persia became decadent and was conquered by a small force of Afghans from Kandahar. The savage tribesmen massacred thousands of the citizens of Ispahan, who betrayed extreme cowardice. But a deliverer arose in the person of Nadir Kuli, who, first as a leader of banditti and afterwards as a general, fought his way to the throne of Persia. Once crowned Shah, with all the resources of Persia at his disposal, he avenged the invasion of Persia by the capture of Kandahar.

Liberator Who Turned Tyrant

He then advanced on Delhi, where he easily defeated the voluptuary who sat on the throne of Babar. He thus obtained the "wealth of Ind," and this made him a miser. He conquered Bokhara and Khiva and returned to Persia, where he was welcomed as the saviour and avenger. Had he used the millions wrung from India to repair the poverty of ravaged Persia, his name would still be blest and perhaps his family would still occupy the throne. Instead, he treated Persia as if it were a conquered country, and his tyranny was so detestable that his own guards murdered him. Thus died Nadir Shah, the outstanding figure on the stage of Asia in the eighteenth century and her last conqueror.

Persia lost many of her provinces after the assassination of the conqueror of Delhi. Ahmad Shah, who commanded the Afghan division, marched off home and founded the kingdom of Afghanistan, which his descendants still rule. Westwards, too, Georgia declared her independence, and Turkey recovered her lost possessions. There was a struggle for power between various rival chiefs, which ended in the victory of the head of the Kajar tribe, who founded the present dynasty.

Persia Between the Millstones

Unfortunately for Persia, the Russian empire was expanding southwards at this period. Early in the nineteenth century the two powers fought for the possession of Georgia, victory ultimately remaining with Russia. Persia was mulcted of many rich provinces and, somewhat naturally, sought to balance her losses by recovering what had now become Afghanistan. She was, however, foiled by British policy and arms, and was forced to sign a treaty, by the terms of which she renounced her ambitions in this direction. Russia, who had added the Caucasus to her dominions, now



ONE OF THE TWELVE GATEWAYS OF PERSIA'S CAPITAL CITY

Though an ancient city Teheran lacks structures of antique architectural interest. During the nineteenth century, in the reign of Nasr-ed-Din Shah, the city was enclosed by a fine new wall and moat of a circuit of eleven miles, pierced here and there with lofty gateways, all adorned with intricate glazed-brick patterns, some depicting the exploits of the Persian national hero Rustum

Photo, Imperial War Museum

appeared to the east of the Caspian and overthrew the Khanates of Central Asia, finally ending a series of campaigns by the annexation of the Turcoman country. This completed the virtual envelopment of Persia towards the close of the nineteenth century.

It is important to remember that constitutional government is of recent growth in Persia. When brought into contact with Europe she admired her power and material well-being and desired to adopt inventions such as the telegraph and electric light, but she had no leanings towards change in her form of government. Gradually, however, an agitation was set on foot in favour of reforms, a clean administration of justice being especially desired by the people.

Had the Shah only ruled efficiently in the old way, it is unlikely that the people would have wished for a constitution, but when they saw the independence of Persia being lost through financial obligations to Great Britain and Russia, the proceeds of which were either wasted in the Shah's tours to Europe or were embezzled, a strong feeling was aroused. The immortal method of protest in Persia is to take sanctuary, and this was adopted time and again, the great "bast" being in the British Legation. It resulted in the grant of a constitution for Persia, a

country that was entirely unfitted for such a form of government, and since it was inaugurated the State has drifted towards anarchy.

The outbreak of the Great War found Persia totally unable to protect her borders. She duly proclaimed her neutrality, but was helpless to enforce it. The policy of Germany was to strike at India across Persia, using as her instrument the Turkish army, and it was on this account that most Persian provinces heard the tramp of British, Russian, or Turkish troops. At the outbreak of hostilities there were some engagements between Russian and Turkish troops in the extreme north-west corner of Persia.

Of greater importance was the advance of the British up the Karun River, after the capture of Basra, the protection of the oil-fields, the pipe-line, and the refinery on the island of Abadan being of great importance to the successful conduct of the campaign. Before the advance on Bagdad a division swept the enemy troops which were threatening Ahwaz out of Persian soil, but a force was kept in the district to the end of the war, for the local tribes were always on the lookout for a chance of plunder or destruction.

The Turks in Irak, as Mesopotamia is now termed, were based on Bagdad, and from that centre parties of German

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officers were sent into Persia, well provided with munitions and money. Their instructions were to enlist fighting men locally and to murder all British and Russian officials in Central and Southern Persia. They were helped in this nefarious scheme by winning over to their side the Swedish officers in command of a strong force of Persian gendarmerie. No Persian governor made any effort to protect the subjects of the Entente, the sole anxiety evinced being to make money from both sides, if possible.

The German propaganda was clever, if unscrupulous. It was given out that the German nation had been converted to the religion preached by Mahomet, and that the Kaiser had actually made the pilgrimage to Mecca and was now termed Haji Wilhelm. The British and Russian officials were murdered in some cases, seven branches of the Imperial Bank of Persia were seized and looted, and by the end of 1915 the British and Russian colonies in Central and Southern Persia had been driven out. The Germans used their bands to serve as supports to other parties, whose duty it was to press on into Afghanistan and to give out that they were advanced parties of a German-Turkish force that was on its way to invade India.

The peril was serious, for, had a Turkish brigade reached Herat, the Afghans would have joined them, as would also the predatory tribesmen of the North-West Frontier of India, and at this period there were not sufficient troops in India to withstand such an invasion. Fortunately, only missions reached the late Ameer, who showed remarkable political acumen by receiving his German visitors hospitably, and by engaging in interminable conversations with them and also with his own advisers. Indeed, he went further and summoned a special meeting of Afghan notables to whom the whole matter was explained at great length. Finally, when it was evident that there was no Turkish force on the march, the Ameer dismissed his visitors, pertinently pointing out to them that it would be folly on his part to break off relations with the British until assured of adequate military support.

Meanwhile, in the north of Persia the position was better. The Russians had brought in troops to protect their subjects. This step led to a trial of strength, the enemy ministers trying to persuade the timorous Shah that, unless he fled with them to the south, he would be made a prisoner by the Russians. The Entente ministers made every effort to soothe the



ENTERING KAZVIN BY THE GRANDIOSE TEHERAN GATE

This beautiful gateway, known as the Teheran Gate, and a fine modern hotel are perhaps the only imposing features of Kazvin, for most of the mosques and monuments of the town possess an air of ruin and decrepitude. This gateway is decorated with glazed-coloured bricks to form various patterns, and gives a touch of bright splendour to the squalor and monotony of the surroundings

Photo, Imperial War Museum

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Shah, who hesitated to take the step which, he was informed, might be difficult to retrace. As a result, the enemy ministers left Teheran, followed by ministers and deputies whom they had bought, but the Shah remained and a cabinet friendly to the Entente was formed.

British Mission to South Persia

The position in Central and Southern Persia was considered to be very unsatisfactory by the British, not only from the local point of view, but also because it was realized that the effect on opinion in Afghanistan would be most unfavourable. It was, therefore, decided to send a mission to South Persia with instructions to raise a Persian force for the restoration of the authority of the Shah.

The command was given to Brigadier-General Sir Percy Sykes, who landed at Bandar Abbas in March, 1916, with a wholly inadequate staff, and immediately set to work to enlist men. The Persian notables of the Kerman province were suffering from German oppression, as but small efforts were made to control their followers, who robbed and murdered. Sir Percy Sykes, who had been Consul at Kerman, and was well known in the province, benefited by this state of affairs and received urgent appeals to march into the interior and drive out the Germans.

Upon his report of the favourable change in the situation, a small force of Indian troops, numbering 700, was placed at his disposal, and he immediately marched to Kerman, where he was warmly welcomed. The Germans had fled westwards towards Shiraz, but General Sykes was able to secure their arrest and retention. After re-establishing the British colony, which had returned with him, the little column marched west to Yazd, where the British had recently returned.

Restoration of Law and Order

Meanwhile much had been happening in Irak. Kut-el-Amara had fallen in April, 1916, and the Germans, never forgetting their policy of invading India, sent a Turkish force, 18,000 strong, with instructions to drive back the weak body of Russian Cossacks and take Teheran. This powerful column advanced to Kermanshah and then to Hamadan, from which centre it dispatched a force to march on Ispahan, which was held by a weak garrison of Cossacks. An appeal was made to the little column of Indian troops, which marched rapidly to the support of the Russians. Their strength was exaggerated, with the result that the Turks retired to Hamadan.

Thereupon the British, after a halt, continued their march to Shiraz, which

was settled upon for the headquarters of the South Persia Rifles, as the new force was finally called. At this centre a brigade was speedily raised, mainly by taking over the derelict Persian gendarmerie, and a second brigade was raised at Kerman. The Indian troops were then used to restore order in the robber-infested land, after the receipt of some welcome reinforcements.

The new order was welcome to the landowners, the peasantry, and the merchants, but it was most distasteful to the powerful nomad tribes, who had been a law to themselves and were carrying raiding to such an extent that the peasantry were disappearing from the soil. Chief of these tribes were the Kashgais, who numbered 150,000 souls and possessed perhaps 30,000 warriors, most of whom were well armed. The Arab tribe was less powerful, but equally addicted to raiding. In 1917 the capture of Bagdad reacted most favourably on the situation in Persia, and the Kashgai chief had a meeting with Sir Percy Sykes, at which he agreed to stop his tribesmen from looting. During that year the position was favourable, the deserted routes being again thronged with caravans and the peasantry returning to villages which they had deserted owing to nomad raids.

Persia Mendicant Among Powers

The collapse of Russia may be held to start from the issue of the notorious Army Order No. 1 in the same month that saw the capture of Bagdad. Its result in the East was to open to Germany the way to India by the Caucasus and Central Asia, where there were many thousands of prisoners of the Central Powers, who could have speedily been formed into a formidable army for the invasion of India. The situation for the British was desperate, and so desperate measures were appropriate.

It was decided to send a military mission to the Caucasus across North-West Persia, and to attempt to prevent the Turks from reaching the Caspian Sea at Baku, where, in addition to being able to gain touch with their prisoners in Central Asia, the oilfields would have been of great military value. General Dunsterville was appointed to command this mission, and after exciting experiences reached Baku with 1,000 British infantry. With this tiny force he heroically held Baku for six weeks against two Turkish divisions at a most critical period. Finally he was obliged to evacuate Baku and returned to Persia.

Another striking feat was the hoisting of the White Ensign on the Caspian Sea and the defeat of the Bolshevik fleet. Yet another mission was dispatched

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across Eastern Persia to keep the Bolsheviks from joining hands with the Turks. These missions are dealt with in Sir Percy Sykes's "History of Persia," but can only be mentioned here, as Persia was not their war area, but merely served as their lines of communication.

In March, 1918, the final great attack in the west was held by the Persian Government to point to a German victory. As a result, the South Persia Rifles were denounced as "a threat to Persian independence and integrity" and the Kashgais were encouraged to attack the British. The Indian column was about 2,000 strong, with a high percentage of recruits, and it was impossible to send any reinforcements to Shiraz. After an action in which the Kashgais were defeated, large reinforcements reached them and the British were invested for six weeks. Ultimately they defeated the enemy after desperate fighting and thus saved a second Kut, the effects of which at this period of the war would have been very serious, the Punjab seething with inflammable matter which burst out into flame some months later. The Ameer, too, might have been forced to abandon his neutrality.

After the Armistice Persia was ready to congratulate the victors, and it seemed likely that, under British influence, this ancient state would recover somewhat of her former position. Unfortunately, corruption is the keynote in Persia, and

as the British were unable to satisfy the grandees, who batten on the foreigner as well as on their own people, Persia became cold to her ancient ally and turned to the Bolsheviks. The Foreign Office tried to arrange for help by means of financial advisers and British officers, but insufficient attention was paid to Persian susceptibilities, with the result that to-day the British are detested by the ruling class in Persia.

When the Bolsheviks had proved to be unsatisfactory in this respect, America was expected to grant a loan; but it is probable that Persia, which makes no attempt to live on her own resources, will make the discovery that the British are her only genuine friends. It is clear that the British do not wish to increase their responsibilities in Persia, but Persians consider their arid country so valuable that they believed that the British coveted it, and, until they realize that these fears are baseless, it is impossible to re-establish perfect confidence.

At present, owing to the disbandment of the South Persia Rifles and the extreme weakness of the Government, little revenue is being received. The Persian idea is to propose reforms, to secure a loan, and then to insure that the reforms are rendered nugatory. At present it cannot be too clearly understood that the ancient kingdom of Cyrus, of Darius, and of Shah Abbas is engaged in a "Rake's Progress" that can only end in disaster.

PERSIA: FACTS AND FIGURES

The Country

Forms a tableland of from 3,000 to 5,000 feet in elevation, and is traversed by numerous chains of high mountains. Climate mainly hot and arid except between mountain ranges near Caspian and that sea. In this district vegetation is extensive, but in the south and centre any large shrubs are infrequent. Main rivers flow to Shatt-el-Arab at the head of Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea. Southern coastal area deficient in perennial streams and has an unhealthy climate. Salt deserts, marshes, and wastes of shifting sands cover large areas to east and north-east. Total area about 630,000 square miles, and is bordered north by Caspian Sea and Turkistan, south by Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea, east by Afghanistan and Baluchistan, and west by Mesopotamia. Population estimated at about ten millions.

Government and Constitution

Limited monarchy ruled by Shah, with assistance of Cabinet. Country divided into thirty-three provinces under governors-general. Each town has chief magistrate. Majlis, or National Assembly, has been convened, and meets from time to time.

Commerce and Industries

Food products include milk, wheat, barley-millet, rice, and fruits. The production of gums, wool, cotton, carpets, tobacco, and silk is considerable. Minerals are numerous, but except in the case of oil, largely undeveloped, and include coal, lead, copper, marble, and iron. Along the shores of the Persian Gulf the date palm is widely

cultivated. The total value of exports for the year 1920-21 was £14,728,264. Among articles exported from Persia are opium, petroleum, fruits, raw cotton, and carpets. Among main imports are sugar, tea, rice, spices, and animals, the total import figures for same year being £18,982,492. Standard coin, the silver Kran. Nominal value between fourpence and fivepence.

Communications

About 350 miles of railway. Much of the country's commerce is carried on over the great trade routes, the main route running from Teheran to Bagdad. There are, over 10,000 miles of telegraph wire and telegraphic communication with India. A letter post has been instituted.

Religion and Education

Bulk of population belong to the Shiite sect of Mahomedanism, and there is a large minority of adherents to the Sunni persuasion. Besides these Mahomedans there are about 10,000 Parsees, 50,000 Armenians, and 40,000 Jews. A ministry of education has been instituted, and many schools established on European lines. Public funds support a number of colleges for the teaching of Arabic and Persian literature.

Chief Towns

Teheran, capital (estimated population 220,000), Tabriz (200,000), Ispahan (90,000), Meshed (75,000), Kerman (70,000), Kermanshah (50,000), Yezd (45,000), Resht (35,000).



PERUVIAN HOMESTEAD SET LIKE THE CONDOR'S EYRIE ON THE EASTERN EDGE OF THE HIGH ANDES

Adobe mud and coarse grass are the usual building materials of the Peruvian Indians, but on the Andean tablelands, or punas, between ten and fourteen thousand feet above sea-level, these fail the sparse population, and are replaced by stones and bark from the trees at the edge of the tree-line. It is a harsh existence that the natives lead here, cultivating tiny patches of ground carved out of the wind-swept, mist-draped mountain sides, tending their llamas and vicuñas, and cut off from the outer world by the vast heights that surround them

Photo, G. M. Dyott